



Security Council

Seventieth year

Provisional

7430th meeting

 Tuesday, 21 April 2015, 10 a.m.
 New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Judeh/Mr. Hmoud/Mrs. Kawar	(Jordan)
<i>Members:</i>	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	Chad	Mr. Cherif
	Chile	Mr. Barros Melet
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Lithuania	Ms. Murmokaite
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. McLay
	Nigeria	Mrs. Ogwu
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland ...	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, Egypt, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Maldives, Mexico, Morocco, Namibia, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, Ukraine, Qatar and Zimbabwe to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Deputy Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following individuals to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, and His Excellency Mr. Fodé Seck, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and I now give him the floor.

The Secretary-General: I am grateful to the Kingdom of Jordan for organizing today's meeting. It comes at yet another crucial period in the evolution of

the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as the whole region is threatened by violent conflicts and extremism.

Over the years, we have seen determined efforts to achieve a comprehensive, negotiated peace based on a two-State solution. Instead of peace, however, there have been decades of missed opportunities and failures that have come at an enormous human cost. The prospect of a two-State solution continues to recede, with potentially explosive consequences. In the coming weeks, a new Israeli Government will be formed. I strongly urge the incoming Government to reaffirm Israel's commitment to the two-State solution and to take credible steps to foster an environment conducive to a return to meaningful negotiations, including a freeze of settlement activity.

I welcome the agreement reached last week between the Palestinian Authority and the Government of Israel, under which Israel has now transferred more than \$470 million in revenues collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. I wish to underline, however, that the recurrent withholding of such revenues is counterproductive and seriously undermines the ability of the Government of Palestine to carry out its responsibilities. I urge the parties to find a sustainable solution on tax collection in line with the Paris Protocol of the Oslo Accords.

Seven months since my last visit to Gaza, I continue to be concerned by the fragile security situation, the lack of progress on intra-Palestinian reconciliation and the pace of reconstruction. Gaza is facing a crushing financial crisis. Public sector employees remain unpaid. The impact of the conflict and of extreme poverty on Palestinians in Gaza has been severe. I urge the international community to support a second humanitarian payment to Palestinian civil servants in Gaza as an integral part of the necessary and agreed crucial reforms.

I welcome ongoing efforts to promote Palestinian reconciliation. The Government of National Consensus must assume its leadership of Gaza, including control of border crossings. Until the crossings are fully reopened within the framework of resolution 1860 (2009), the temporary Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism shall continue to serve as a critical tool to alleviate the suffering of Gaza's people. To date, the Mechanism has enabled approximately 70 per cent of households in need of shelter repairs to procure the necessary materials. Additionally, 60 of 130 projects funded by the international community and the private sector have

been approved by Israel, with six of these currently under way.

These are promising developments, yet the needs remain enormous. Despite the generosity of some donors, critical funding gaps threaten stability. Humanitarian agencies are struggling to raise the \$720 million needed for temporary shelters for 100,000 internally displaced people. Without immediate funding, the World Food Programme will be forced to suspend its food assistance to 95,000 Palestinians in Gaza by July. Gaza's water and energy supply is also perilously unstable, with no long-term solution in sight. I again urge donors to fulfil pledges made in Cairo last October.

In the West Bank, clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians continue, along with the destruction of Palestinian-owned structures. Administrative detentions are increasing at an alarming pace, including the recent arrest of and charges against a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Such realities feed frustration and tension in a vicious cycle that undermines the path to peace. Both sides need to see more constructive actions, such as Israel's recent approval of a master plan for building 2,500 housing units and public buildings for the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem. Such steps can help to reduce pressure, but they also need to lead to tangible results.

The international community must do more to promote a return to negotiations that will end nearly half a century of occupation and allow two States, Israel and Palestine, to live side by side in security and peace. I am encouraged by current discussions among Member States. The United Nations is committed to supporting such efforts.

Both sides face difficult choices. But one choice stands above all others: whether to choose peace or the death, destruction and suffering that have defined the conflict for far too long. Too many lives have been lost, too many families have been destroyed, too many livelihoods have been shattered and too much distrust has been sown. Ultimately, the parties themselves must demonstrate the commitment and courage necessary to chart a viable course towards a better future.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the Deputy Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the delegation of the State of Palestine, allow me to thank you, Your Excellency Mr. Nasser Judeh, Deputy Prime Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, for presiding over this important meeting of the Security Council. We also congratulate Jordan on its presidency. We very much appreciate the Jordanian delegation's efforts to address the many critical issues on the Security Council's agenda, including its principled, unwavering support for the just cause of Palestine.

(*spoke in English*)

We also express our appreciation to the delegation of France for its skilled leadership of the Security Council during the month of March. We thank His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing and his unrelenting calls and efforts for peace, humanity and justice. We congratulate his new Special Representative and Special Coordinator, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, on his appointment, and we wish him success and affirm our readiness to cooperate with his efforts. We also reiterate our deep appreciation to Mr. Robert Serry for his years of service. We recognize his efforts in support of the Palestinian people and Government through many critical periods during his tenure, including three brutal Israeli wars against Gaza, as well as his constant efforts to advance solutions to emerging problems and to promote peace, including his impassioned entreaties to the Council to act to bring an end to this devastating conflict, which remains a threat to international peace and security.

Regrettably, our collective appeals to the Security Council have been unanswered, with all initiatives for serious action thwarted, the latest on 30 December 2014. The failure to act has greatly fostered Israel's impunity and compounded the conflict, with the heaviest price paid in human suffering and in the credibility of the international system.

As we mark next month 67 years since the Al-Nakba of 1948, and mark in June 48 years since the 1967 Israeli occupation began, the tragic irony of those dates should not go unnoticed. The Palestinian people are enduring the longest occupation in modern history, and over 5 million Palestine refugees have been enduring nearly seven decades of exile. They are a people struggling to preserve their national identity and existence in the face of overwhelming challenges in their ongoing quest for liberation. Their crisis has become untenable; it has become existential.

When Palestinians in Gaza are mercilessly slaughtered and maimed by the Israeli occupying forces in their homes, United Nations schools, playgrounds and hospitals; when mothers and fathers are killed and 1,500 children are orphaned in the course of 51 days; when destruction and humanitarian disaster are wantonly inflicted on them; when they are subjugated to a dehumanizing, suffocating blockade, crippling their society, forcing them to live in poverty in the ruins of their communities, and isolating them from the entire world — the crisis is existential.

When they are killed or injured by Israeli occupying forces in peaceful protests for simply demanding freedom and an end to occupation; when their land is stolen and colonized; when their homes are demolished and they are dispossessed, impoverished and forcibly displaced; when they are terrorized by extremist settlers; when their religions are insulted and their religious sites, including mosques and churches in their Holy City of Jerusalem, are desecrated; when thousands of civilians, including children, are detained and imprisoned, their minds and bodies tortured, their families broken — the crisis is existential.

When the State of Israel legislates more than 50 discriminatory and racist laws against its Palestinian Arab citizens, and constantly attempts to negate their identity and history; when that State's political, religious and military leaders voice threatening diatribes against them, including calls to "chop off heads with axes" of those who oppose their extremist policies, and calls for the transfer of Palestinian Arabs — the crisis is existential.

When a refugee camp in Syria, where Palestine refugees have peaceably resided for more than 60 years awaiting a solution to their plight, is ravaged by war and siege, comes under barbaric assault of terrorists of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, and is described by the Secretary-General as "the deepest circle of hell", with children, women and men forced to flee for their lives, dispersed and traumatized once again; when Palestinians, whose resilience is legendary, are drowning in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, along with others attempting to escape war and poverty — the crisis is existential.

How many indignities, injustices and tragedies must one people endure? How far must the situation deteriorate before the Security Council upholds its Charter duties and its own resolutions to contribute to a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli

conflict and to peace and security in our region? How long will Israel, the occupying Power, be permitted to deny the Palestinian people their rights and freedom without consequence? How long will Israel ignore the bold Arab Peace Initiative, insisting instead to impose endless conflict?

When we have reached this point — the depths of crisis so grave — the Security Council's deliberations on the question of Palestine should be anything but routine, and the sense of urgency should be great. There is unanimity that the situation is unsustainable and that a solution must be achieved without delay. The exception is Israel, which remains intransigent, continuing to believe it is a State above the law that can perpetrate crimes and obstruct peace with zero accountability, while falsely believing that the conflict can be managed and that the occupation can continue indefinitely. This was starkly reaffirmed last month when the two-State solution, enshrined in Council resolutions from 242 (1967) onward, was openly ridiculed and tossed aside by the Israeli Prime Minister during the elections, further proving Israel's deceit throughout years of negotiations.

Faced with this situation, will the Council work to salvage that solution, or allow it to disintegrate, triggering a frantic drive for alternative solutions — foremost the one-State — and guaranteeing many more years of violent conflict and suffering?

We believe it is time for leadership by the Council. The fundamental parameters of the two-State solution have long been clear and globally endorsed. It must be based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative. It must be based on the 4 June 1967 borders. Israel must fully withdraw from the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, and end its occupation in all manifestations, including the illegal settlement enterprise. A just solution must be found for the status of Jerusalem as the capital of two States. And a just solution must be achieved to the Palestine refugee question based on resolution 194 (III) and the Arab Peace Initiative.

There is also broad agreement that creating a credible political horizon requires setting a time frame to end to the Israeli occupation. The Palestinian people need to believe — and be given hope — that the occupation will end. And, admitting the failure of more than 20 years of negotiations, it is widely agreed that the political process should not be reincarnated and that

an international conference and framework of support for negotiations would be a more rational, viable path towards a solution. Moreover, there is agreement that the critical situation in Gaza cannot be ignored in any attempts to move a political process forward.

As we consider that consensus, we recall that there was no actual consensus in 1947, and yet the international community somehow found the political will to act, adopting General Assembly resolution 181 (II), which partitioned Mandate Palestine and created the State of Israel. In 2015, however, there is an international consensus. Based on that consensus, in which 135 countries recognize the State of Palestine and European Parliaments call on their Governments to accord official recognition as an investment in saving and actualizing the two-State solution, we believe it is high time for the international community to exert the political will necessary to make the two-State solution a reality, to achieve the independence of the State of Palestine, to rectify the historic injustice inflicted on the Palestinian people and to establish genuine Palestinian-Israeli peace and coexistence.

We therefore appeal to the Security Council to seriously respond to this crisis and to assist the parties to overcome the dangerous impasse. A meaningful draft resolution must be adopted and, more important, the determination must be found to implement the international will for the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, whereby the State of Palestine and the State of Israel can live in peace and security within internationally recognized borders. We commend France's initiative in that regard, in close coordination with the Arab Ministerial Follow-up Committee, and the widespread calls by Member States for the Council to uphold its duties and its clear, principled expressions of support and readiness to contribute to creating a credible political horizon. Palestine stands ready to cooperate with those efforts. We reaffirm our commitment to pursuing a peaceful, political, diplomatic and legal path to the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, a just, comprehensive peace that fulfills that people's legitimate national aspirations to live in freedom and dignity in their State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as a just solution for the Palestine refugees.

Beyond a political process, the situation on the ground must change. Immediate efforts are needed to stem the deterioration of the situation before the

situation completely destabilizes and slips beyond our reach. The international community must act urgently to compel Israel to cease its illegal policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which, in 2014, witnessed the highest civilian death toll since the occupation began in 1967. Hollow words and promises will not suffice. The international community must demand that the new Israeli Government demonstrate its intentions and commitment to peace and respect for international law. Israel must cease its settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. We cannot have a two-State solution while Israel continues to actively and illegally alter the demographic and physical situation, and entrench the occupation. It must cease the confiscation of Palestinian land, the construction of settlements and the wall, the demolition of homes and the forced displacement of civilians. It must bring a halt to the terror, violence, provocations and incitement by its settlers, including in occupied East Jerusalem and towards the Al-Aqsa Mosque — a toxic situation that could erupt at any moment, including in a religious conflict. Israel must end the arrest and detention of Palestinians, including children, and stop its abuse of prisoners and detainees and act forthwith to release them. It must cease its constant attempts to undermine the Palestinian Government and institutions.

In the Gaza Strip, the scars of war must be healed. Emergency efforts are needed to alleviate the humanitarian disaster wrought by the Israeli war. Recent reports, including by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), UNICEF, and the Association of International Development Agencies, attest to the dangers of this festering crisis, and we must heed the warnings. The illegal Israeli blockade must end, and Gaza's crossings must be opened for unimpeded humanitarian access, the sustained movement of persons and goods into and out of Gaza and a link with the West Bank. Reconstruction is imperative, as more than 110,000 people remain internally displaced. The fuel and water crises must also be addressed.

We appeal to donors to honour reconstruction pledges, and we recognize the generosity of donors who have done so. We also appeal for continued support to the Palestinian Government of National Consensus, under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah, to empower it to assume full responsibility in Gaza and play its role in addressing the

many challenges. All of that is essential for rebuilding Gaza, reviving its destroyed economy and giving hope to our people. The alternative is allowing desperation, anger and radicalization to increase, especially among our large youth population, making inevitable another implosion, which must be averted at all costs.

We also reiterate our call for protection for the Palestinian people. They are a defenceless civilian population entitled to protection under international humanitarian law and to avail themselves of all the protections of international law. That is the primary reason for our accession to the Geneva Conventions, core human rights instruments and other international treaties, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. We will not cease calling, and working, for the protection of our people, accountability for all the Israeli war crimes perpetrated against them, and justice for the victims.

Before concluding, I must add a few words about the crisis of Palestine refugees in Syria, particularly in the Yarmouk refugee camp. The conflict in Syria has rendered their situation precarious, and their needs for assistance and protection are immense. We welcome the press statement issued yesterday by the Council, as well as the press elements of 6 April focusing on Yarmouk. We recall resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014). We urge full compliance with their provisions. The obligation to protect civilians in situations of armed conflict must be respected by all parties. We reiterate the call for unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access and assistance to the camp's residents and those displaced from Yarmouk, and for the safe temporary relocation of any civilians seeking refuge from the violence. We recognize the efforts of UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl during this crisis, including his important Council briefings and visits to Yarmouk, and are grateful for the valiant efforts of UNRWA staff, along with partners in the field, in providing support to the Palestine refugees in Syria and in the neighboring countries of Lebanon and Jordan, despite extremely difficult and unstable circumstances. We urge donors to respond to UNRWA emergency appeals as swiftly and generously as possible, while fully recognizing the long-standing support of the international community and host Governments over the decades. Today, we also reaffirm the official position of the Palestine Liberation Organization to maintain the neutrality of the Palestine refugee camps in Syria and the refusal to be drawn into the conflict. The Palestinian leadership also fully

shares the international community's hopes for a political solution to end the horrific conflict in Syria.

In conclusion, we stress that this tragic crisis reconfirms the real vulnerability of the Palestine refugees and the need for a just solution to their plight in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli and Arab-Israeli peace that we continue to seek. Although hopes for peace have diminished, our conviction in the justness of our cause and our commitment to peace remain resolute. We respectfully implore all the members of the Security Council seated at this table to demonstrate the responsibility and leadership needed to open the doors for peace, to revive hope and to advance these goals as both a matter of urgency and necessity for our region and our world.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Prosor (Israel): Let me begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his briefing. I also want to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriate Affairs of Jordan for being here today to preside over this special meeting.

Earlier this month, Jews throughout the world celebrated Passover, which commemorates the liberation of the ancient Jews from enslavement and the birth of the Jewish nation. The Seder begins with the youngest child in the family asking four questions, also known as Ma Nish'tana. The child asks "What has changed and why is this night different from all other nights?" We answer the questions by recounting the story of how freedom triumphed over oppression. Those lessons are as relevant today as they were 3,000 years ago. For centuries, the Jewish people longed for, prayed for and fought for the right to be free. Israel is the realization of those dreams, and Passover reminds us that we can never take those freedoms for granted.

Since our last debate on this topic (see S/PV.7360), the chaos in our region has only grown worse. Another nation State has been overrun by radical extremists — first Syria, then Iraq, then Libya and now Yemen. The extreme elements in our region have displayed a level of barbarism that is shocking, even by Middle Eastern standards. The situation has become so dire that, in a rare display of unity, the Arab leaders have joined forces. It should come as no surprise that they have lashed out with little regard for the consequences. The Saudi-led air strikes in Yemen have hit humanitarian aid convoys, hospitals, schools

and civilian neighbourhoods and left entire families dead. Yet there have been zero Human Rights Council condemnations and zero calls for commissions of inquiry. If the novelist Jane Austen were writing about the United Nations today, the book could be called *Pride and Prejudice*, but a more fitting title would be *Hypocrisy and Double Standards*. One would think that some of the Arab nations would demand justice. After all, the Saudi Ambassador was quick to stand at the side of the Palestinian representative during last summer's Gaza conflict and preach about the value of civilian life. The truth of the matter is that when Israel is at the heart of a crisis, the Arabs do not miss a beat. But when fingers cannot be pointed at Israel, some Arab nations show themselves to be downright heartless.

On Passover we ask what has changed. Today, I am here to tell the Council that unless it stops singling out Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East, and starts focusing on the real threats in our region, nothing will change. Just as we ask four questions on Passover to tell the sad story of freedom, today I offer four questions to explain why freedom and peace remain a distant dream in the Middle East.

The first question is: What has changed with regard to Iran? The answer is that Iran is more dangerous today than it has ever been before. Make no mistake — Iran is not only a threat to Israel, and it is not only a threat to the Middle East. It is a threat to the entire world. Iran is the engine of aggression behind the chaos in our region. It has supplied Hizbullah, which today has more than 120,000 missiles hidden in and within civilian neighbourhoods. Hizbullah is playing a dangerous game of Russian roulette. Instead of betting on red or black, they are now gambling everything on the Blue Line, where Iranian-sponsored terrorist groups surround Israel. There is Hizbullah in the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon, with Hamas in Gaza. The Iranian doctrine is apparent from Baghdad to Beirut and from Damascus to Sana'a. Terrorists are committing a double war crime, hiding behind civilians, while targeting civilians.

As Iranian influence spreads, so do tyranny, subjugation and terrorism. In the past four years alone, Iran has committed or ordered attacks in 25 countries on five continents. I am sure the representative of Bahrain has not forgotten the last time that Iran meddled in that country's internal affairs, much as I suspect the Saudi Ambassador in Washington, D.C., still remembers the bitter cup of coffee he had at Café Milano. Imagine

how much more dangerous the situation will become in our region and around the world if Iran is allowed to snap open a nuclear umbrella. Iran is cunning, and it is fanatical. Yet the international community is willing to allow the regime to keep its thousands of centrifuges, continue developing its long-range ballistic missiles and conceal the military dimensions of its nuclear programme.

What message is the Council sending when it rewards an outlaw regime for violating Security Council resolutions and international law? Ayatollah Khamenei lies, deceives and betrays even more than does the character Frank Underwood of the television show *House of Cards*. The two of them would get on like a house of cards on fire. What about President Rouhani? One of his first acts as President was to appoint Mostafa Pourmohammadi — known in Iran as the Minister of Murder — as the Minister of Justice. He has lived up to his name. In the past year, Iran has executed 753 people; that is the highest total recorded in the past 12 years. Iran is one of the worst human-rights offenders, the primary sponsor of global terrorism and is behind much of the chaos ravaging the Middle East. If the international community gives Iran its support by signing a nuclear agreement, the regime will be more dangerous than ever before.

The second question is: What has changed when it comes to Hamas? The answer is nothing. Hamas continues to abuse its people and wage war against Israel. Last summer, Hamas proved its utter disregard for the well-being of the Palestinian people. It hid its rockets in schools, fired missiles from hospitals and used civilians as human shields. Today, Hamas is once again disregarding the needs of its people as it rearms and rebuilds its terror infrastructure.

Earlier this month, Israeli authorities revealed that Hamas is using the Kerem Shalom crossing, the only humanitarian crossing to Gaza, to hide tons of dual-use items inside shipments of humanitarian goods. The smuggled materials are used to rebuild tunnels, reconstruct training camps and manufacture rockets. Since Operation Protective Edge, Hamas has test-fired more than 150 rockets. With every test rocket launched into the sea, Hamas propels itself towards another conflict. Just in the past week, a senior Hamas leader issued a new call for Palestinians to kidnap Israelis. It may just be my hearing, but I have yet to hear a single United Nations official report on any of those inflammatory developments. Some Members of

the Organization refuse to name Hamas as the terrorist group that ignites tensions in our region and ignites United Nations offices. In January, Hamas members looted and set fire to the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process in Gaza.

The Council does no favours to the Palestinian people by failing to hold Hamas to account. I have not heard any criticisms of Hamas for denying its people freedoms or for failing to hold free elections. The closest Hamas has come to reaching out to the people in Gaza is the social media campaign it ran earlier this year. In an effort to improve its image, Hamas encouraged people to ask questions on Twitter using the hashtag *#AskHamas*. A number of important questions were posed to the terrorist group. Those questions included: How does Hamas prevent repetitive strain injury when firing dozens of rockets into Israel on a single day? Does Hamas think it is better to hide its weapons in a hospital's pediatric or its geriatric unit? Is Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal right- or left-handed? From the safety of his luxury hotel in Doha, he seems equally adept at ordering room service with one hand, while ordering terrorist attacks with the other.

It is time for a change. The Council must see Hamas for what it is and call it what it is — an internationally recognized terrorist organization. Stop giving Hamas a free pass and start giving Israelis and Palestinians a chance for a better future.

The third question is: What has changed when it comes to the Palestinian leadership? If nothing has changed with Hamas, why should one expect anything to have changed with President Abbas? President Abbas claims to support the two-State solution, but apparently that message gets lost in translation because one will never hear him make that claim in Arabic. He insists that Palestinian refugees be allowed to flood the Jewish State. So in truth he is committed to the creation of two Palestinian States. President Abbas also claims to oppose terrorism, but his Government forged a pact with a terrorist organization, pays salaries to convicted terrorists and incites violent attacks against Israelis.

Last month, the Palestinian Authority dedicated a monument in Ramallah to the terrorist responsible for the murder of 37 Israeli civilians. As if that were not bad enough, the monument is in the shape of what the Palestinian Authority describes as Palestine, and it includes all of the State of Israel from the

Mediterranean Sea to the Dead Sea. The Palestinians want a State without making compromises, without making concessions and without making peace. I want to be clear. Israel is in favour of a Palestinian State, and that would end the conflict. On three separate occasions, Israel offered the Palestinians a State, and on all three occasions the Palestinians refused the deal or walked away from the table.

The very last thing Israel can afford is another terrorist State in its backyard. Just imagine what that State would look like. We got a preview when Israel disengaged from Gaza in 2005. Hamas took over the Gaza Strip and created a terror stronghold. Given the chance, Hamas would gladly create a second terror State in Judea and Samaria. Such a terror State might as well be called ISIL, which would stand for Iran, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. It would be sponsored by Iran and would be as volatile as Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon.

Hamas is terrorizing the people of Gaza, and the Palestinian Authority is not doing anything about it. It has ignored its oversight obligations, namely, to ensure that construction materials are not channelled into terror activities. It has not imposed sanctions on merchants selling cement on the black market. In contrast, Israel has fully cooperated with the trilateral Gaza reconstruction mechanism and has overseen the transfer of tens of thousands of tons of construction supplies. If President Abbas is serious about making peace, he must break his alliance with Hamas, put an end to incitement and return to direct negotiations with Israel.

The fourth question is: What has changed when it comes to the international community? Winston Churchill once said, "A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on". Month after month, individuals in this Chamber have argued that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a territorial dispute that can be resolved by addressing the so-called root causes. That lie has circled the world countless times.

The fact of the matter is that our conflict is not about the right place for Israel's borders. It is about Israel's right to exist in the first place. Israel stands for democracy, for human rights and for freedom. Last month, the Jewish State held its twentieth national election. That makes 20 more free and fair elections than Qatar and Iran have ever held. Yet Members of the

Organization question Israel's democratic nature and focus disproportionately on our conflict.

The agenda item of today's debate is "The situation in the Middle East", but listening to the meeting briefing, one could well think that the only thing taking place in the Middle East is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The world's disproportionate focus on our conflict is an injustice to the tens of millions of victims of tyranny and terrorism in the Middle East. One has to wonder why the Palestinians deserve more time and attention than the Yemenis, the Syrians or the Libyans put together. The time has come to focus global attention where it belongs, namely, on the terrorists and their sponsors. The enemies of freedom are trying to drive us back to the dark ages. They deny women their freedom, censor the media, dictate how religion must be practiced and impose their radical way of life through barbaric acts of violence. Israel is on the frontline of that fight, but it is not just Israel's fight. It is the fight of anyone who believes in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.

The Jewish people have fought for those rights for generations. Israel was one of the first countries in the world to screen people at airports. For its efforts to protect passengers, Israel was criticized for putting travellers through an invasive ordeal. Three decades later, Israel's once so-called insensitive policies have become the standard procedure at every airport across the globe. In its short history, Israel has repeatedly confronted the moral dilemmas that go hand-in-hand with combating terrorism, long before other democracies woke up to the threat. Make no mistake — Israel's battle today will determine how we all live tomorrow.

Tomorrow, Israel will commemorate Yom Hazikaron and honour the 23,320 individuals who have lost their lives to war and terror. We will remember the brave soldiers who died so that we can have our freedom, and we will mourn the thousands of men, women and children who were robbed of their lives simply because they were Israeli. War has never been the choice of the State of Israel. Our choice is and always has been the path of peace. But when war and terror are forced upon us, we will not surrender, and we will not back down. For nearly 2,000 years, the Jewish people were stateless and powerless in the face of hatred and indifference. Those days are no more.

On Thursday, Israel will celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut, our sixty-seventh anniversary as a free and independent

Jewish State. With great joy and with heads held high, we will celebrate the realization of the words of our national anthem, *Hatikvah*. Our hope will not be lost — the hope of 2,000 years, the hope to be a free people in our own land, the land of Zion and Jerusalem.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I will now make a statement in my national capacity.

I am honoured to preside over today's meeting of the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. We would like to take this opportunity to emphasize Jordan's commitment, in particular through its membership in and presidency of the Council this month, to continue working with other members to achieve the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations with respect to the maintenance and preservation of international peace and security, as well as international harmony and stability. Supported by the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah II and relying on the policies of Jordan, which reflect the voice of logic, wisdom and balance in an ever-changing hotbed of tension, we intend to use our position productively in pursuit of those noble goals.

The Kingdom of Jordan is presiding over the Council at a delicate stage, when multiple, shifting challenges demand an instantaneous response in the face of constant change. We would therefore like to reiterate that failure to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a two-State solution, whereby a fully sovereign, independent State of Palestine would be established on Palestinian soil along the borders of 4 June 1967, with Al-Quds-al-Sharif as its capital, would intensify the dangers to our region. There are legitimate international reference points to support that view.

The Kingdom of Jordan is close to Palestine and its citizens, and its situation impacts us directly. Jordan is not a mere observer or mediator in the peace process but has a real and tangible interest in achieving peace through serious and committed negotiations based on a timetable conducive both to bringing about the two-State solution and to tackling all substantive issues, including the status of Jerusalem, refugees, security, borders and water, *inter alia*. All those issues affect the interests of Jordan in accordance with the principles of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative, and must be resolved in a manner that fully satisfies vital Jordanian interests.

Regarding occupied East Jerusalem, as well as Muslim and Christian holy sites, in line with his Majesty and Jordan's oversight role in East Jerusalem, we will continue to make every effort to preserve and protect them, in particular Al-Haram al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Furthermore, we will not compromise on any Israeli infractions on this matter and will take the appropriate legal and diplomatic measures to counter them. In accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, Jordan will continue to preserve the Arab character of East Jerusalem and its position as a city under Israeli occupation.

Concerning Palestinian refugees, we host the greatest number of Palestinians living in the diaspora, the majority of whom are Jordanian citizens, and support their inalienable status as refugees. Protecting their legitimate rights, as dictated by international law, is a core responsibility. As a host country, we have rights and duties imposed on us by the massive burdens that we have borne since the Palestinians became refugees. I would like to express here my deep appreciation to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for its ongoing efforts in support of Palestinian refugees in our region. Additionally, I the great burden of our expenditures in supporting the Palestinian refugees, which exceed the UNRWA budget.

We continue to emphasize the need for an immediate and lasting solution of UNRWA's budget problems and deficit. This is the only way to allow UNRWA to continue its work and programmes until a final solution to the question of the Palestinians refugees is reached. It is no secret that any reduction in the Agency's services will be tantamount to making an indirect call on hosts countries to make up for these services, and these States can not bear this burden.

As to the Gaza Strip, Jordan calls on the international community to lift the suffocating Israeli blockade on Gaza, put an end to the deteriorating humanitarian tragedy and make a serious effort to achieve reconstruction. This is our collective duty in the face of the suffering imposed on the beleaguered children of the Strip.

We call for concerted efforts to resume direct negotiations in order to achieve the two-State solution and find a comprehensive settlement. These negotiations must be earnest, characterized by good intentions and time-bound. They should be complemented by commitment to avoiding any unilateral action that

would prejudice the outcome, including settlement activities, which are illegitimate in the eyes of the entire world.

We will pursue our efforts a member of the Security Council and President this month — in addition to our membership in the Arab ministerial committee entrusted to consult with international parties — to launch serious negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian parties and to conclude an international agreement within parameters that all parties can agree upon, including the possible adoption of a unanimous Security Council resolution that identifies a time-table for the negotiations to end the occupation and achieve the two-State solution, we are conducting requisite negotiations on this score through the aforementioned ministerial committee by maintaining contacts with all interested parties and States.

The tragedy being endured by Syria has entered its fifth year and is deteriorating day by day. Killings, assassinations and destruction persist in that country. This tragedy feeds radicalism, criminality and terrorism, which are outlawed by all international conventions and religions. Consequently, we have to press ahead in finding a political solution in Syria, which, as we have stressed since the beginning of the crisis, is the only way to meet the aspirations of the Syrian people and achieve political transformation into a new reality in which all Syrian parties will take part. Such a solution would be based on the outcomes of the first Geneva negotiations, restore stability to Syria and uproot terrorism in that country, which is now reaching beyond its borders. It should also preserve Syria's territorial integrity and political sovereignty and allow for the voluntary return of Syrian refugees, particularly those in neighboring States. On this matter, we will elaborate in extenso at the briefing on 24 April.

I wish to express our appreciation of the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis. Jordan is hosting more than 1.5 million Syrian citizens, with whom we share our limited resources. This task has overburdened Jordan's economy and exceeds its capacities. In that regard, I thank all those brothers who have assisted us, particularly Kuwait, for its significant efforts in hosting three pledging conferences.

We support political legitimacy in sisterly Yemen, which is embodied in President Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi Mansour, and reiterate our full endorsement

of the resolutions adopted at the most recent Arab summit, held last month in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, which emphasize support for legitimacy in Yemen and assistance in accordance with the joint Arab defence initiative and Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, and reject any attempt to undermine the legitimacy, territorial integrity and political independence of Yemen. We reiterate our call for full commitment to the implementation of resolution 2016 (2015), an immediate end to the violence and unilateral actions, rejection of any violent overthrow of power, the normalization of the situation in Yemen and a return to the political track and dialogue, in accordance with the Gulf Initiative.

The Kingdom of Jordan emphasizes the need to help sisterly Libya to consolidate its security, sovereignty and stability, as well as to support the elected Parliament and the Government, as they are considered the basis of legitimacy, and we encourage national dialogue among the Libyan national parties that reject violence and radicalism. The adoption of resolution 2214 (2015), submitted by Jordan, is part and parcel of that effort. We welcome the dialogue between the Libyan brothers, hosted by Morocco, and we support Mr. Bernadino León's efforts. We hope that they will succeed.

In recent years, the danger of terrorism has been on the rise in our region and the world. Criminal and terrorist gangs under different names and forms, such as Daesh, Al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa, Boko Haram and Al-Qaida, have hijacked tolerant Islam and distorted its image. Our religion is innocent of such violence. All religions have a peaceful message. Those gangs perpetrate their horrendous crimes in the name of our great religion of Islam, but they are unrelated to it. Islam provides a model for cherishing human dignity and life and the rights of man, for respecting dialogue and for accepting the other. Therefore allow me to reiterate the words of His Majesty King Abdullah II in his statement before the European Parliament:

"All my life, every day, I have heard and used the greeting, Assalamu aleikum, a wish for the other to be blessed with peace. That is what it means to be a Muslim. More than a thousand years before the Geneva Conventions, Muslim soldiers were ordered not to kill a child, a woman or an old person, not to destroy a tree, not to harm a priest, not to destroy a church. These are the same values of Islam that we were taught in school as children: not to destroy or desecrate a place where God is

worshipped, not a mosque, not a church, not a synagogue. This is what it means to be a Muslim. These are the values that I teach my children and that they hand on to theirs."

Therefore, I would like to say once again that the ideological war will be long, involving many fields and different levels. It is a war launched by an enlightened ideology against a retarded ideology that calls for killing and assassination. This requires a collective effort and cooperation among all States that agree with these lofty goals with a view to protecting themselves from the dangers of terrorism and radicalism. Here, I would like to emphasize the need for immediate and collective work, as I have mentioned, as well as for developing a comprehensive strategy that includes military and political aspects, the renewal of religious speech, the rectification of erroneous concepts and ideas adopted by people, as well as the launching of cultural campaigns that address people's minds and use sound logic.

The modern-day Khawarij, with their terrorist gangs and their radicalism, are expanding because of underdevelopment and the inequitable distribution of wealth, a political vacuum and the presence of sectarian and religious strife among the different strata of society and within States. That makes it necessary not to allow any such imbalances in our countries. We must pave the way for the return of harmony and stability to those sisterly Arab States whose social fabric has been harmed. We are descending into violence and radicalism.

In that connection, we would like to affirm our support for the current Iraqi Government and Prime Minister Mr. Haider Al Abadi in their combat against terrorism and in their quest to eliminate criminal gangs from Iraqi territory. We also support their efforts to achieve national reconciliation. We are equidistant to all components of Iraqi society. We state that the participation of all of the components of Iraqi society in a substantive process, not the marginalization of any of those elements, is necessary for the success of those efforts. Iraq is a sisterly, neighbouring State to Jordan. Its security is our security.

In light of the changes taking place in the region we are following the framework agreement agreed to between the P5+1 on the Iranian nuclear file. We have always emphasized the need for a peaceful solution, while asserting the right of people to make peaceful use of nuclear energy. We hope that the final contour

of the agreement will consolidate peace and security in our region and the world, and will lead to solving many other issues.

(spoke in English)

I will switch to English for a couple of minutes as I address the question of the need to arrive at a peaceful settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In anticipation of the formation of the new Israeli Cabinet and given the situation in the region, I would like to mention to the Ambassador of Israel that the region has never been short of excuses not to do things. I think that what we need to examine today is the set of decisions needed to create peace, not to look for excuses not to do that. The Arab Peace Initiative, as I am sure the Ambassador will appreciate, contains all the elements needed to ensure that peace is sustainable, but for that peace to take shape and be implemented, will power and good intentions are needed.

With all due respect for the television shows that people watch, whether it is House of Cards or Pride and Prejudice, at the end of the day the reality on the ground requires that we all put our differences aside and that we launch a substantive time-bound, peace-negotiating process that will ensure the end that we all seek, namely, the two-State solution. I would advise the Ambassador to revisit the Arab Peace Initiative and look at the elements that we still are committed to in the Arab world. Like I said, that will not only ensure peace between Israel and the Palestinians, but between Israel and the entire Arab world.

Given all the dynamics within and beyond the region, especially the threat of terror and extremism, the Palestinian question remains the essence and the root cause of much of the instability that we see in our part of the world. It is through resolving the Palestinian/Israeli conflict and achieving peace and security for all the peoples and States of the region, especially Israel, that we will be able to collectively deal with the dangers and threats that we all face as a region. Israel must become part of the region, not just be in the region. Through peace, I think that end will be achieved.

(spoke in Arabic)

In conclusion, I would stress that Jordan will continue to act resolutely to strengthen relations of cooperation and friendship between the peoples of the world. We will continue with our message of promoting international peace and security and confronting despair and hatred under one human umbrella. History,

geography and a common future link us all. Together, we will be able to build the basis of mutual respect for the benefit of all future generations.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Council.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank you, Minister Judeh, for presiding over this meeting. Your presence testifies to the huge significance of the issues before us.

On 8 April, two Israeli soldiers, a medic and a paramedic, were stabbed in the West Bank by a Palestinian man. On 20 April, a 28-year-old Arab municipal worker was stabbed in Herzliya, north of Jerusalem, by an Israeli who reportedly screamed "Death to Arabs". Those are just two of the recent attacks that reflect the persistent and deadly tension between Israelis and Palestinians. It is critically important that leaders urgently re-engage in efforts to achieve peace, which is the most effective way to prevent such tension from escalating, as it has too many times before.

The United States remains committed to a two-State solution that results in a secure Israel alongside a sovereign and independent Palestinian State and that can bring lasting peace and stability to both peoples. A two-State solution is the only way for Israel to ensure its future as a Jewish and democratic State, and it is the best path forward for Israel's security, for Palestinian aspirations and for regional stability. It is important that both sides refrain from any actions that could further destabilize the situation in the region and undermine the prospects of reaching a two-State solution. It is good that the parties have reached agreement on the transfer of Palestinian clearance revenues, an important step that will benefit the Palestinian people and help stabilize the situation in the West Bank.

We welcome the arrival of the new United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, who brings with him deep diplomatic experience in the region and has already been meeting with key figures since he arrived on the ground about a week ago. We encourage all sides to work closely with him.

We also strongly support United Nations efforts to encourage donors to disburse funds as soon as possible to meet the commitments they made in Cairo in October

2014. To support that effort, the United States has disbursed more than 95 per cent of our Cairo pledges and provided additional money above our original pledge amount. However, although up 100,000 Palestinians reportedly remain displaced in Gaza, only a fraction of the funds pledged in Cairo have been released. Member States must step up, and United Nations agencies must be able to carry out their operations in Gaza without disruption.

Let me now turn to Syria. In the weeks since the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), with the support of the Al-Nusra Front, advanced on the besieged community of Yarmouk, the already desperate situation of its estimated 18,000 residents, most of them Palestinians, has gotten even worse. People long deprived of food, potable water, medical supplies and other vital humanitarian support now find themselves trapped between warring parties, which show a callous disregard for the welfare of civilians. Residents have reportedly been barrel-bombed by the regime from the air and shot at by ISIL and other armed groups from the ground.

While thousands appear to have escaped, many thousands are still trapped. In Tadamon, a neighbourhood bordering Yarmouk, some of those who have managed to escape are sheltering in a school. Last week, a man there said, of the Al-Assad regime's siege in Yarmouk, "We lived inside a disaster. We were dying there, for two years and six months, with no water, no electricity." Another escapee said "We got out just as you see us, with nothing else. We ate animals and leaves." A woman named Fatima stood cradling her baby boy, born less than two weeks earlier in Yarmouk. Fatima told the officials she had fled because she feared her son would die if they did not get out.

Siege is a tactic we see applied across Syria by both the Al-Assad regime and terrorist groups. Last month, Under-Secretary-General Amos told the Council (see S/PV.7418) that the United Nations estimates that 440,000 civilians are living in besieged areas, meaning most people cannot get out, and assistance cannot get in. Some aid groups estimate the total is much higher. In Dayr Al-Zour, another besieged city, ISIL has systematically blocked humanitarian access and even cut off the water supply for months at a time while regime forces have prevented residents from leaving.

The Al-Assad regime and the terrorists use the suffering of Syrian civilians as just another tool to advance their position or undermine that of their

enemies. This must stop. All parties have an obligation to protect civilians, and all parties have an obligation, under resolution 2165 (2014), to enable the immediate and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance directly to people throughout Syria by United Nations agencies and implementing partners. All civilians who want to leave besieged areas must be allowed to do so safely, without being detained, interrogated or separated from their families. The Al-Assad regime's assurances count for nothing, so international supervision for any relocation from Yarmouk is urgently necessary.

We members of the Security Council have an obligation as well to ensure that the reported use of chemical weapons is investigated thoroughly and promptly and that those responsible are held accountable. Since members of the Council adopted resolution 2209 (2015) on 6 March, condemning the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon, we have seen allegations of at least a dozen attacks involving the use of chlorine or other chemical agents.

Last week, Council members heard first-hand from Dr. Tenari, who works in Sarmin's field hospital, which received more than 120 victims of just one of those attacks. There were so many victims, he said, that they were piled on top of one another on the floor. He told us about how he and his colleagues did everything they could to save three siblings, aged one, two and three years, with the hospital's paltry resources. He told of the doctors' and nurses' sense of helplessness as they tried to pump oxygen into the delicate chests of these small children. He told of his unspeakable grief as he washed their tiny, lifeless bodies.

If we members are appalled upon hearing such accounts, and I do not believe that there was a person in that room who was not shaken by Dr. Tenari's experience, we must channel our indignation into stopping more attacks like it from occurring. That begins with the Council enforcing the resolutions it has already adopted, such as 2209 (2015) and 2118 (2013), which the Al-Assad regime has repeatedly ignored.

Ending those attacks also requires countries to stop propping up and arming the regime and instead use their leverage to help stop Al-Assad from gassing, barrel-bombing, torturing and starving Syrian civilians. Countries of the region and those with influence must come together to press for a political solution, which is the only way to end this wretched conflict. To that end, we welcome the renewed push by Special Envoy

De Mistura to expand ongoing dialogue efforts and the Secretary-General's robust support for those efforts.

As President Obama has said repeatedly, the only viable political solution is one without Al-Assad in power. He has no legitimacy and no role to play in Syria's future. Partnering with Al-Assad will not help us defeat violent extremist groups. It will only make them stronger.

One reason it is so important to reach a political solution is the deeply destabilizing effect the conflict is having on Syria's neighbours, such as Lebanon, where one in four of the country's residents is now a Syrian refugee. Since the influx of refugees began, Lebanon's unemployment has doubled, and its schools have taken to teaching double shifts. The crisis in Syria has also exacerbated Lebanon's security challenges, particularly those posed by violent extremist groups. The Lebanese security and armed forces have played a crucial role in countering these threats and defending the State's authority. We also commend the ongoing effort undertaken by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and Special Coordinator Kaag to prevent any escalation in hostilities along the Blue Line, an effort made all the more challenging by Hizbullah's dangerous actions, such as its acquisition and evident willingness to use weapons in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon area of operations.

Resolving the Syria crisis and mitigating the unrivalled suffering caused by the conflict inside Syria and in neighbouring countries — and I thank Minister Judeh for Jordan's generosity in sheltering so many refugees from Syria — could not be more urgent.

Mrs. Adnin (Malaysia): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening and chairing today's meeting. Your presence here today clearly demonstrates the importance Jordan attaches to today's open debate. I also thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing.

My delegation associates itself with the statements to be delivered by the representatives of Iran and Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, respectively.

We have all heard loud and clear the message conveyed by the Secretary-General to the Council repeatedly on the untenable situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. The situation on the ground is undeniably moving further and further away from a two-State solution on a daily basis. Over the years, we have witnessed relentless and systematic actions by the

Israeli authorities to chip away the conditions for a two-State solution. This includes the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory in complete disregard of international law and the overwhelming views of the international community. The escalating settlement constructions further led to the demolition of Palestinian homes, the forced displacement of Palestinian families and increasing violence and provocations by Israeli settlers.

We have heard condemnations by the international community, but no real action has been taken, including by the Security Council, to halt the emerging one-State reality. Instead, the international community continues to tackle the symptoms of the problem, such as the humanitarian crisis and terrorism, since it lacks the political will to address the root causes of the problem and end the longest occupation in modern history.

Based on repeated failures in bilateral negotiations for the past four decades to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Malaysia believes that the time has come for the international community in general, and the Security Council in particular, to lead the way to end the status quo in the occupied Palestinian territory. Prolonged foreign occupation of Palestine by way of oppression, injustice and discrimination will do nothing to safeguard Israel's long-term security concerns. Instead, it has brought about despair, anger and extremism, with repercussions that continue to resonate far across the globe.

For those who insist that the only way to create a Palestinian State is through bilateral negotiations, I urge them to apply the same standard to Israel. Would the State of Israel have existed if the international community had insisted that Israel could be created only through direct bilateral negotiations with its neighbouring Arab countries? Is it not time for the Council to act decisively on the creation of a Palestinian State, just as the General Assembly did in 1947 to create the State of Israel?

One aspect of the unsustainability of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory that Malaysia wishes to highlight is related to the gross violations of Palestinian children's rights. About 300 Palestinian children are now being detained by the occupying forces in the West Bank, including in occupied East Jerusalem. Over the past three years, the number of child detainees has increased by 87 per cent. Moreover, the existence of a juvenile military court in Israel, the only such court in the world, is clearly in violation of the Convention on

the Rights of the Child, the Fourth Geneva Convention and other provisions of international law.

According to Defence for Children International, more than 700 Palestinian children are sentenced in Israeli military courts every year. Ill treatment of Palestinian children in the Israeli military detention system is widespread and systematic and nearly three out of four kids experience some form of physical violence during arrest, transfer or interrogation. Such practices are causing widespread trauma, the loss of childhoods and increasing radicalization. Malaysia condemns this unacceptable situation and calls for the release of Palestinian children detained by Israel. We urge Israel to adhere to its obligations under international law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which it is a State party.

Malaysia welcomes the recent accession by Palestine to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Such action will go a long way towards ending impunity and deterring war crimes and crimes against humanity by both sides. Similarly, we welcome Palestine's decisions to accede to various international and multilateral conventions and treaties. We continue to support the peaceful, legal and multilateral efforts by Palestine to be a respectable member of the international community who abides by international law, norms and standards.

After last month's poignant final briefing by the outgoing Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, we have seen some positive momentum among Council members to initiate concerted efforts towards resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Malaysia stands ready to play a constructive role in the Council in realizing a two-State solution. We reiterate our long-standing support for the inalienable right of self-determination for the Palestinian people and a just, comprehensive and final solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Mr. Wang Min (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China appreciates Jordan's initiative to convene this open debate on the question of the Middle East. I thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing. I have also listened attentively to the statements delivered by the representatives of Palestine and Israel.

The question of Palestine is at the core of the question of the Middle East and affects regional peace and stability. As the current situation in the Middle East remains volatile, resolving the question of Palestine and

Israel has become more important and urgent. China hopes that the parties concerned will redouble their efforts in the following aspects so as to move towards an early solution to the question between Palestine and Israel.

First, both Palestine and Israel should adhere to the strategic choice for peace talks. The creation of an independent State of Palestine through peace talks and the peaceful coexistence between the two countries is the only way out for the problems between the two countries. China urges Palestine and Israel to keep peace in mind and come together to resume peace talks as soon as possible and make progress therein. We hope that Israel will demonstrate good will and sincerity, stop the construction of settlements and completely lift the blockade on Gaza. At the same time, Israel's legitimate security concerns should also be addressed.

Secondly, with regard to the question of Palestine, the Security Council should step up and assume its essential responsibilities and respond positively to the reasonable demands made by Palestine and other Arab States. It should play a greater role in promoting peace talks, putting an end to the occupation and facilitating the reconstruction of Gaza. It should take practical actions to promote progress on the question of Palestine.

Thirdly, the international community should strengthen coordination and widen its vision. China hopes that the existing mechanisms for the peace process in the Middle East will be further utilized. Meanwhile, countries of the region and relevant regional organizations should be encouraged to play a positive role. Efforts should be stepped up so as to resume peace talks between Palestine and Israel as soon as possible so that the situation can move in the right direction.

Fourthly, the humanitarian situation in Gaza must be alleviated effectively as reconstruction there faces a multitude of challenges, including the Israeli blockade, the volatile situation in Palestine and the massive gap in financial resources. We therefore urge the international community to deliver on its promises of aid, to cooperate with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in every way possible and play a positive role in safeguarding the rights of the Palestinian refugees and providing humanitarian assistance.

China firmly supports the people of Palestine in their just cause seeking the restoration of their legitimate national rights and, in its own way and

through its own channels, has always engaged actively with the parties concerned to facilitate dialogue and promote peace. We have always supported the creation of an independent Palestinian State on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital and enjoying full sovereign rights. We have also supported Palestine and Israel living in peace and security. We are open to all initiatives that may contribute to the resumption of peace talks.

China's special envoy for the Middle East paid another visit to Palestine and Israel in April and has engaged actively with both parties to facilitate peace talks and promote peace. China will continue to make great efforts with a view to finding a solution to the question of Palestine and alleviate the humanitarian situation.

The Syrian crisis has entered its fifth year and has caused profound suffering to the people of Syria. It has also gravely affected regional peace and stability. A political solution is the only way to restore peace, stability and development in Syria. China has always supported the United Nations playing a positive role in finding a political solution and supported the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. De Mistura, in his good offices. We also welcome the efforts of Russia and Egypt, among others, to promote a political solution to the question of Syria.

China calls on the international community to remain steadfast in its commitment to a political solution and to exert positive influence on all the Syrian parties urging them towards a swift ceasefire and end to the violence so as to find a settlement plan that fits the particular situation of the country and takes account of the interests of all parties.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement, which underscored the need to act to preserve the two-State solution.

I once again express my warmest congratulations to the Jordanian presidency of the Security Council as well as our profound appreciation of your presence, Sir, at this important debate.

Since last summer, France has maintained a simple position — the two-State solution is fast disappearing. The continuation of the illegal settlement activity undermines, day on day, the viability of a Palestinian State on the ground. The political vacuum raises the risk of escalation. In Israel and Palestine alike, public

opinion is becoming radicalized and support for the two-State solution is dissipating.

There is therefore an urgent need to end the downward spiral we are witnessing. To do so, we must reaffirm our commitment to the two-State solution and thence map out a political path leading to the creation of a Palestinian State alongside that of Israel. Without such a political path, we will have to face the continuation of the unilateral strategies under way, which will serve only to fuel the mistrust between the parties. It is in no one's interests for security cooperation to cease; for the Palestinian Authority, in which we have invested so much, to founder; or for diplomatic spats to ensue in international institutions, always with the underlying risk of an explosion in violence. We cannot pretend that these risks do not exist.

France's analysis for several months now has been based on a simple premise — only with renewed and strengthened international support can the parties commit resolutely to the necessary path of peace. Everything in the recent past shows how vain it would be to hope that Israel and the Palestinians can resume, and less likely still conclude, negotiations without a major change in methodology. The peace process, as we have been going about it for more than 20 years, has not succeeded. To pretend otherwise is tantamount to accepting the irreversible deterioration of the situation on the ground.

France renewed efforts to mobilize the Security Council last autumn, when we listened to the calls for patience from our partners — that we had to wait for primaries then for elections. We must now take stock of the Israeli elections and statements made around them.

Against the present backdrop, the international community has two options. The first option is to manage the crisis with stop-gap solutions, hoping that the degree of violence remains contained and waiting for better timing to address the underlying problems. There will, unfortunately, be good reasons to move the goalposts, for instance to the formation of the Israeli Government, regional events or yet further elections. What will happen tomorrow, while the settlements, violence and tension carry us ever closer to a point of no return, when everybody loses?

The second option is to take action. This is France's choice, not only as it is our responsibility as a member of the Security Council but also because we have a direct interest in the emergence of a Palestinian State

to contribute to stability in the Middle East. The choice to act must, in our view, be based on two particular elements. First, the international community must act jointly. France wants to promote a new approach incorporating a greater number of partners in addition to the central role of the United States — namely, the European Union, the League of Arab States and the permanent members of the Security Council — with a view to helping the parties to make the difficult compromises that are necessary for peace and to support them in their implementation.

Moreover, the Security Council can provide useful support in this process and must be a central player in the conflict. This does not mean imposing a solution on the parties, of course, but setting the framework for negotiations. Indeed, it is the responsibility of the Security Council to adopt a consensual and balanced resolution that finally sets the parameters of the final status and a timetable for negotiations. Almost 50 years since the adoption of resolution 242 (1967), this is an imperative step. Such a resolution must provide a credible basis for a resumption of negotiations and generating the necessary renewed healthy political momentum.

Let us be frank; there will be no Palestinian State, and therefore no peace in the Middle East, without a strengthened collective commitment on the part of the international community. We cannot give up and we cannot resign ourselves to a status quo that would lead inevitable to disaster. We believe more fervently than ever that there is no alternative to the establishment of a Palestinian State: it is in the interests of all parties and above all of peace. That is why it is vital to ensure that the Security Council shoulders its responsibility.

Ms. Murmokaitė (Lithuania): The political and security situation in the Middle East has rarely been more dramatic. The worst possible humanitarian crisis is unfolding there, and the most brutal and savage abuses of human rights are being committed as conflicts flare and radical extremists seek to strengthen their foothold in the region. As the conflict in Syria enters its fifth year, the situation in that country could not be more dire. We have lost count of the dead, and the Syrian Government continues to fail in its responsibility to protect its own people, instead waging a war on its own population, using barrel bombs, mortars, shelling, torture and forced disappearances. While the dismantling of Syria's declared chemical-weapons programme is nearing completion, reports of repeated

chlorine attacks on civilians raise new concerns. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons should urgently investigate all such reports, and the perpetrators must be brought to account, including through referral to the International Criminal Court.

Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) remain largely unimplemented. The lack of humanitarian access in Syria is devastating. As we have discussed twice this month in Council consultations, the situation of the Palestinian refugees in the besieged camp of Yarmouk in Syria remains horrific, and the suffering there defies description. There are other besieged locations to which access has been cut off for even longer periods of time, such as Darayya, where United Nations aid last arrived in October 2012. We can only imagine the situation there. This already unbearable situation has been compounded by the spread of Da'esh, whose extreme savagery has shocked the world time and again.

The four long years of the Syrian crisis have put the Council's credibility increasingly in question. A political solution could not be more urgent or imperative. Relaunching a political dialogue in line with the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex) is paramount. The Council should stand united behind the efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura to alleviate the suffering and plight of the Syrian people and find a viable and inclusive political solution to the crisis. Ensuring justice and accountability should be an integral part of that process. The commission of inquiry has suggested possible avenues to be followed to make sure that all those who have committed serious violations of human rights, crimes against humanity and war crimes are brought to justice. The onus is on the Council to act.

Hailed as a success story only a year ago, Yemen is now on the brink. The Council must do everything it can to prevent Yemen from falling into the abyss of sectarian strife, civil war and fragmentation. We welcome the adoption of resolution 2216 (2015), which has imposed an arms embargo and expanded sanctions measures against the spoilers and their associates. The resolution also includes an important call to resume and accelerate inclusive United Nations-brokered negotiations. It is our firm belief that the United Nations remains indispensable to efforts to bring Yemen back on a track towards a peaceful transition.

In Iraq, political leaders, led by Prime Minister Al Abadi, are working to promote national unity

and reconciliation. Those efforts are taking place in the shadow of the deadly presence of Da'esh, which has managed to grab large parts of Iraqi territory and launch savage attacks on ethnic and religious minorities, including torture, executions, enslavement, gang rapes and child recruitment. Last year, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria torched 11 of 35 churches and monasteries scattered around the city of Mosul, destroyed the statues of poets and literary and historical figures and dug up the grave of the prophet Jonah. In March, Da'esh militants stormed several churches and Christian graveyards, smashing hundreds of crosses and headstones on Christian graves. Historic cities, the monuments of Khorsabad, Nineveh, Nimrud and Hatra, and Sufi shrines, all forming a precious and irreplaceable part of the world's historical and cultural heritage, have been destroyed. Unique artefacts are being trafficked to finance criminal terrorist enterprise.

As they chase Da'esh out, the Iraqi people are now discovering mass execution sites in areas liberated from the terrorists and are mourning their loss. It must be stressed, however, that the lingering grievances that preceded Da'esh's onslaught should not be compounded by new abuses directed at Sunni communities, which would undercut the progress that the country so badly needs. We take note of the Prime Minister's calls to the Iraqi armed forces and Shia militias to refrain from violence. Progress must be made in the areas of genuine inclusiveness, reconciliation and just and adequate revenue- and wealth-sharing. We also urge the Government of Iraq to reaffirm its commitment to international justice by acceding to the Rome Statute.

Moving on to the Middle East peace process, we welcome the appointment of Mr. Nickolay Mladenov as the Special Coordinator and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, as well as that of the new Special Representative of the European Union, and wish them all the best in their exceptionally important and difficult tasks. The challenges are enormous, but the process must move forward. Wait-and-see is not an option. There can be no solution other than an immediate resumption of peace negotiations aimed at reaching a final political settlement based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles — including land for peace — the road map, the agreements previously reached by the parties and the Arab Peace Initiative, leading to two democratic and sovereign States living side by side within established borders, in peace and security and mutual recognition. That is the only way to address both the aspirations of the Palestinian people

to viable statehood and Israel's concerns about genuine and lasting security. The current stalemate is not sustainable, and it is explosive. Any unilateral action or incident could lead to renewed and dangerous violence that would close the remaining window of opportunity for reaching a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

In Lebanon, multiple challenges collide. The refugee burden is huge. The country's policy of dissociation from the Syrian crisis must be maintained. The presidential vacuum has lasted too long and must be solved without further delay. The international community should continue supporting the Lebanese security and armed forces and helping the country to manage the impact of the influx of Syrian refugees, including the provision of essential services such as education and health care. That is vital to the preservation of Lebanon's stability and security. We welcome the strong presidential statement on Lebanon that the Council issued on 19 March (S/PRST/2015/7). We call on all concerned to implement its provisions and the relevant Council resolutions in full, including by working to ensure stability along the Blue Line.

Finally, I would like to express our appreciation for Jordan's tremendous efforts in tackling the Syrian refugee crisis and maintaining a balancing, constructive role in a highly volatile and fragile region.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening and participating in this open debate on the Middle East, including the question of Palestinian, a subject that the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela considers crucially important. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his participation.

Our delegation associates itself with the statement to be delivered later by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Sadly, the Middle East is enduring a terrible situation marked by war, sectarian violence, instability, extremism and foreign interference, which has resulted in massive violations of its peoples' fundamental human rights and an unprecedented expansion of the terrorist organizations that have been ravaging the territories of the region with an unusually powerful military capacity. But while the entire situation in the Middle East deserves our attention, the situation of the Palestinian people and the occupation of their

territories is a root cause of the conflict in the region and a permanent threat to peace. The Palestinian issue is the most emblematic of all the armed conflicts and of the continuation of colonialism and foreign occupation in the Middle East, a remnant of the colonial partition that followed the Second World War. From 1948 until today the Palestinian people have been subjected to a systematic process of colonization and expulsion from their own territory, as evidenced by the more than 7 million Palestinians who have been forced to live outside of Palestine, in contravention of General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which proclaimed the inalienable right of Palestinians to return to their land and to be compensated for the damages they have suffered.

Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories and the settlement process that it has conducted as an occupying Power have developed in contravention to the Charter of the United Nations and international law. The Security Council has adopted more than 68 resolutions on the question of Palestine, and Israel has openly ignored all of them. It seems that when it comes to the Palestinian question, there is a double standard among the countries in the Security Council, which is responsible for ensuring peace, the human rights of the Palestinian people and the respect for international law. The impunity with which Israel behaves is a decisive factor in the worsening of the conflict, which, after more than 60 years, could become a terrible failure on the part of the Security Council. This represents a challenge for the Council to act constructively in the quest for a peaceful solution to this question. We firmly believe in multilateralism and in the need for this matter to be resolved through the decisive action of this body of the United Nations.

Venezuela deems it crucial that the Security Council work decisively on a definitive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. This involves an end to the occupation of the Palestinian territory and the establishment of a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State within internationally recognized pre-1967 borders.

The Venezuelan delegation reaffirms its full support for the right to self-determination, which would allow nationals of the State of Palestine to live within internationally recognized borders, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

Our country calls for an immediate end to the settlement process of which the Palestinian people are victims. The construction of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories must end. We reject the demolition of Palestinian homes and the construction of new Israeli settlements, which form part of an expulsion and colonization process that the Security Council has spent more than 50 years discussing without having put an end to this illegal situation.

We must also put an end to the recurring practice of the blockading and destruction of the Gaza Strip, the territory where the Israeli occupying Power is carrying out systematic violence, transforming it, sadly, into a new ghetto that is home to human tragedy and the despair of an entire people.

The impunity with which Israel acts in denying the Palestinians their right to an independent future and in the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force against the Palestinians was made very clear in the middle of last year, when Israeli military forces spent more than seven weeks indiscriminately bombing the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip, using all of the sophisticated weaponry at their disposal, including arms banned by the United Nations, such as cluster bombs and phosphorus bombs.

Let us recall that 2,220 people were killed during that short period of time, of whom 551 were children — children whose deaths, like those of all the other children who have been killed there throughout the years, leave an indelible mark on the human conscience. Our country calls for an end to impunity and for the necessary accountability of those responsible for these crimes against humanity.

There is a particular and unfathomable cruelty to the violence of the occupying Power against Palestinian children. Since 2000, more than 10,000 children have been imprisoned in Israeli detention centres, resulting in psychological consequences that are difficult to overcome. The latest UNICEF report indicates that within the Israeli military detention system, the mistreatment of Palestinian children would appear to be widespread, systematic and institutionalized.

Besides the victims that are counted in the various reports of the United Nations agencies referring to the Palestinian question, we cannot overlook the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the area as a result of the violence. According to estimates by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs,

more than 500,000 people were displaced last year during the most recent Israeli military operation against the Gaza Strip, which represents the highest number of IDPs since 1967.

It is high time for the Council to express to the people of Palestine its unanimity as to a political solution to the conflict based on the peaceful coexistence of two States: the Israeli State and the State of Palestine. We cannot accept the denial of the existence of a Palestinian State, otherwise there can be neither peace nor justice.

As the Israeli military occupation is the main cause of the clear violations of human rights of the Palestinian population and of international humanitarian law, Venezuela calls for the establishment of a timeline that would put an end to the unsustainable and illegal occupation of territories belonging to the State of Palestine, in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 446 (1979), *inter alia*.

Our country encourages the parties to continue negotiations to achieve a firm and lasting peace where both States can live as sovereign and independent countries in safety, within internationally recognized borders.

A comprehensive political solution to the conflict must include a commitment to respecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Lebanon and Syria.

Lastly, we invite the Council to take a proactive stance aimed at shoring up the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, which would make it possible to break the current deadlock. A negotiated political solution to this question would be decisive for peace and security in the Middle East.

Although we call for a negotiated solution based on the peaceful coexistence of two States, then Palestine must be recognized as a State and a full Member of the United Nations, and to do so it must benefit from a resolution of the Council establishing that fact.

Lastly, we call on this organ to assume the responsibilities that the Charter of the United Nations has conferred upon it in its Article 4.

Mr. Cherif (Chad) (*spoke in French*): I should like to welcome you, Mr. Minister, and thank your country for having convened this high-level open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I should also like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing.

My statement will be focused mainly on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the situation in Syria.

Regarding the Palestinian question, we are of the view that everything has been said at previous Security Council meetings, open and closed, yet no significant headway has been made in the political process. Indeed, negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians are at a standstill, while Israeli settlement and occupation activities continue, with near-daily arbitrary detentions and attacks on Palestinian civilians by the occupying Power.

Just two weeks ago, 107 Palestinians, including children, were arrested. This was further compounded by the ongoing seizure of land, the illegal expansion of settlements, and the various collective-punishment measures inflicted on the Palestinians, which make their lives increasingly difficult and decreasing the likelihood of a genuine peace in the region.

Thus the recent statements made by the Israeli Prime Minister during the electoral campaign publicly calling into question the two-State solution dangerously undermine prospects for a viable peace, which could put an end to the conflict and give Palestinians a sovereign and independent State within pre-June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In the light of the situation, the Security Council must assume its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations by clearly and effectively committing to saving the solution of two States living side by side on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles — especially land for peace — the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative. That is the only realistic and feasible way for the Palestinians to satisfy their aspirations to self-determination and for the Israelis to meet their legitimate security needs.

In that regard, we believe that the Security Council should identify a clear plan of action establishing the framework and parameters of future negotiations, pegged to a deadline so as to break the never-ending cycle of negotiations. That will require synergy of action and firm consistency in the international community's approach. In that connection, the Security Council, which bears the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, and other stakeholders in the political process are particularly called upon to act.

Regarding the Syrian crisis, Chad remains deeply concerned over the ongoing deterioration of the

security and humanitarian situations in that country, which is now in its fifth year of conflict with no political solution on the horizon. According to recent statistics issued by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, more than 200,000 people have been killed in the fighting, more than 7.6 million have been internally displaced, and some 4 million have taken refuge in neighbouring countries. This is without a doubt a true humanitarian catastrophe that cries out to our collective conscience.

We call on the international community as one to mobilize additional resources so that United Nations agencies and their partners can deliver the necessary aid and assistance to besieged, displaced and refugee civilian populations. Furthermore, given the difficulties encountered by Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, in obtaining a cessation of hostilities in Aleppo in order to establish conditions conducive to the provision of humanitarian assistance, we believe that it is time to seek specific and innovative ideas that could bring the parties to the negotiating table on the basis of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

In conclusion, it is our moral duty to intensify our collective efforts to find an appropriate and lasting political solution to the Syrian crisis. In that regard, we call on States with influence on the parties to spare no effort in persuading them to reject violence and resume dialogue so as to put an end to that disastrous war, which poses a genuine threat to peace and security throughout the Middle East.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): We would like to extend a warm welcome to you, Sir, and express our gratitude to you for presiding over this very important debate. We thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing, and we shall concentrate our attention on the Palestinian question.

There is an international consensus that a settlement and lasting solution to the Palestinian question and to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would be a decisive development for the attainment of greater stability in the Middle East and for the easing of tensions that are the cause of immense harm to the peoples of the region. There is also an international consensus that a two-State solution is the only viable basis for a comprehensive settlement to the Palestinian question and for peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

It is our understanding that the question of Palestine and the ensuing conflict are the main stumbling blocks to social and political development in the Middle East and a breeding ground for the most radical forms of extremism and terrorism spreading through the region and beyond. We have now reached a critical point, and finding a solution to the Palestinian question is an absolute necessity. The main actors in this tragedy should be aware that what is happening in the Middle East might shape a future of horror, since the present already presents a very grim reality. Against such a backdrop, we intend in this statement to address three straightforward messages to the main actors in the Palestinian question: the international community and the Security Council in particular, the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Over the years, the international community has been called on — to no avail — to play a role in the search for a solution to the Palestinian question, given the impossibility of Israelis and Palestinians advancing towards any meaningful dialogue by themselves and without external assistance. In that sense, and following the collapse of the United States mediation effort, we are of the view that the Security Council, as the organ upon which the international community has conferred the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security in accordance with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, should uphold its responsibilities and apply all its political power, influence and prestige to seeking a comprehensive solution to this painful conflict, which is dangerously harmful to the entire international community. It is our conviction that only a united Security Council has the required influence to assume a leadership role in bringing the parties to the conflict to the negotiating table, mediate the attainment of the necessary concessions, and provide the guarantees needed to advance towards a political and comprehensive solution.

International public opinion despairs over the hesitations and lack of purpose that the Security Council has demonstrated over the years on this extremely sensitive issue. The great Powers in particular should commit their leadership in the Security Council by pushing the parties to the conflict and the entire international community to uphold a solution to the Palestinian question. We believe that the great Powers, being invested with special privileges in the Security Council in accordance with the Charter of the United

Nations, have the capacity to do so. Those privileges, which in our view should be upheld not for mere national interests but instead for strengthening world peace and security, confer on the great Powers responsibilities of leadership that should be applied in order to make a meaningful contribution to resolving the Palestinian question.

It is our conviction that, with the evolving situation in the Middle East, if the Security Council is to remain relevant it must assume in the Palestinian question the statutory leadership role entrusted to it. Angola, as a non-permanent member, is ready to support any initiative that the Security Council might adopt in order to ensure such leadership, and it would be our greatest achievement if, during our mandate, the Council should take positive steps in that direction.

The Palestinian people are the victim of an historical injustice, subject to being refugees and a people under occupation. We deem the maintenance of such a situation as totally unacceptable. The Islamic world perceives it as collective humiliation, which breeds the current trends of extreme radicalism and terrorism. The Palestinian people deserve nationhood status. The framework of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security seems possible to achieve if the international community, and in particular the Security Council, assumes its duty and works to make a reality of resolutions, declarations and the array of decisions adopted over the years on the two-State solution.

In the event that the Security Council finally decides to push forward the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the Palestinians must be prepared for difficult choices, which include reaching real and meaningful unity among them, making painful but unavoidable concessions at the negotiating table, putting an end to the culture of hatred and being politically and psychologically prepared for reconciliation and full recognition of the State of Israel. The maintenance of the status quo, with the Palestinians confined to refugee camps and subject to permanent humiliation, without prospects for a breakthrough for a political settlement, can be a recipe for a disaster of unthinkable proportions — while the regional and international situations deteriorate dangerously.

The Security Council should make Israel understand that the policies of occupation, settlement expansion and collective punishment of the Palestinians are counterproductive and raise formidable obstacles for the

launching of a peace process for the establishment of a viable Palestinian State and for mutual understanding, acceptance and reconciliation. Moreover, such policies destroy the social and political fabric of Palestine, put the Palestinians in an extremely dire situation and pave the way for extremists who seek the worst and are bent on sabotaging any developments towards peace. Like the Palestinians, Israel must be prepared to make far-reaching compromises and concessions to the Palestinians and to the international community, if a settlement for peace is to be achieved under the auspices of the Security Council. It is fundamental that the Security Council deepen dialogue with Israel, that it gives full assurances to the parties as an honest broker and that its members extend firm international guarantees for Israeli and Palestinian security in a peace settlement.

In conclusion, more than 20 years have elapsed since the Israelis and Palestinians were near to a comprehensive peace settlement through mutual concessions and political will for both peoples to live together side by side in freedom, peace and security. It is our conviction that, by assuming a leadership role, a united Security Council will be able once again to put Israelis and Palestinians back on the track towards peace and to make the decisive contribution that we believe it can provide to the attainment of peace in Palestine and the entire Middle East. After the collapse of the American mediation effort, we do not foresee another framework for negotiations. It is up to the Security Council to step up decisive efforts and to assume its responsibilities as the main organ in charge of international peace and security.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are pleased to welcome you, Sir, to preside over the Security Council.

It is clear today that, in essence, the so-called Arab Spring some time ago ceased being a democratic rebuilding. The turbulent processes in the region have led to the fall of former regimes in a number of countries, and to the emergence of difficult crises in others. However, it did not create productive momentum. For example, the recent events in Yemen make it clear that, even in those States that were being touted as models of successful political transformation, events have taken a violent and unpredictable turn. We consider the events in the Middle East as the manifestation of some dangerous universal trends today. The intervention in States of the Middle East and embarking on projects

of regime change for undesirable regimes have led to chaos and destabilization in the region, the subject of foreign intervention in 2011, Libya today has parallel Parliaments and Governments. There are also clashes between armed elements. Another example is last year's events in Syria and Iraq, where extremists from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) took a number of key provinces in a very short period.

Given the scale of the events and the threats under way from ISIS and other such jihadist organizations, it is clear that the threats spread far beyond the Middle East. We have already seen them manifest in Denmark, France, Australia and Canada. Based on our position of principle, we believe that there is a need to combat terrorism. That position has not changed. There is also a need to shore up international efforts to counter this global threat. Counter-terrorism activities must be based on international law and be carried out under the auspices of the Security Council. That is the very foundation upon which we resolved the issue of eliminating chemical weapons in Syria and drew up efforts to counter foreign terrorist fighters. It was on Russia's initiative that resolution 2199 (2015) was adopted, in order to halt the financing of armed terrorist groups by way of the illegal sale of oil.

Russia is interested in a democratic and prosperous Middle East where all sides are brought together by traditional ties of friendship. Unlike others, we draw no benefit from chaos and destabilization. We stand ready to cooperate with all interested parties so as to support the States of the region to resolve the challenges they face. With regard to chronic conflicts in the region, events cannot be allowed to run their course — first and foremost when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is a basic factor of instability in the entire Middle East that helps extremists recruit new members. We think that a fair solution to the long-standing problems in the region will foster overall stability in the Middle East and North Africa.

We underscore our readiness to work bilaterally with Palestinians and Israelis, as well as in international forums, first and foremost the Middle East Quartet of international mediators. In that regard, the Quartet's Munich ministerial statement of 5 February 2011 (SG/2168), concerning closer cooperation between the Quartet and the League of Arab States and interested Arab countries, remains relevant.

In order to resolve the Gaza issue, there is a need for a two-track solution to address the core issues on

the basis of principled positions. In that regard, two things must be dealt with: extending the control of the Palestinian Authority and ensuring stability in enclaves. We reiterate our commitment to moving forward with intra-Palestinian dialogue on the basis of the political platform of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Arab Peace Initiative. Among other things, a long-term solution in Gaza can guarantee Palestinians the timely provision of the donor resources pledged by participating countries at the October 2014 Cairo international conference on Gaza reconstruction.

It is also with that logic in mind that we will continue to be guided in establishing intra-Syrian consultations in Moscow. We believe that, following the first round in April, certain progress has been made in relaunching a search for a political settlement to the Syrian crisis. The main outcome of the last round was agreement on the so-called Moscow platform document, supported by most participants at the meeting, which sets out various assessments of the current state of affairs in Syria. It is clear that, without stepping up direct contacts between the Government and the moderate opposition, there will be no implementation of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). Syrians must come together to counter the growing terrorist threat emanating from ISIS, Jabhat Al-Nusra and other terrorist and extremist groups. For our part, we stand ready to continue to assist intra-Syrian dialogue. We hope that the Moscow momentum will continue to be drawn upon thanks to the efforts of Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Staffan de Mistura, as was the case with the launching of the political process for the Geneva communiqué and his efforts at confidence-building efforts on local truces.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): I would like to thank you for convening this open debate. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing earlier.

Last month marked the start of the fifth year of the Syrian conflict. For the past four years, Al-Assad has repressed, maimed and killed his own people. He has ruined the country he should protect. Syria is now a shell of its former self, and still the situation gets worse. We are deeply concerned by the fate of the Palestinian refugees in Yarmouk, where intense fighting is continuing between armed groups, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Jabhat Al-Nusrah. Thousands of civilians, including many children, have been living under siege from the Al-Assad regime for nearly two years, and are trapped,

with little access to humanitarian assistance. The plight of the people in Yarmouk is also the tragic reality for more than 440,000 Syrians currently under siege by Al-Assad and ISIL, without access to humanitarian assistance. That includes nearly 230,000 people besieged in Dayr Al-Zour by ISIL. They face severe shortages of food and basic goods. Power and water supplies have been cut and public health concerns are growing. We call on all groups to protect civilians, ensure humanitarian access and allow the safe passage and evacuation of civilians.

The need for a political settlement in Syria has never been more pressing. The regime's recent loss of Idlib shows that neither side can win on the battlefield. There is no military solution. The only way to bring about sustainable peace remains a political transition through mutual agreement of the Syrian parties, supported by the international community. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, continues to have the United Kingdom's strong support in his efforts to achieve that, and we look forward to his briefing later this week. We remain clear that Al-Assad can play no part in Syria's future.

We must also be unwavering in our humanitarian commitment to Syria. We thank Kuwait for their leadership in hosting the third International Humanitarian Pledging Conference. The \$3.8 billion pledged goes a long way to meeting the United Nations financing needs for 2015. The United Kingdom itself has now committed more than \$1.2 billion to the Syrian crisis. But more needs to be done. We urge all States to disburse their pledges promptly, and we encourage the United Nations' humanitarian agencies and their partners to scale up humanitarian deliveries to besieged areas, including through cross-border routes.

I will now turn to the Middle East peace process. We all know that the only way to resolve this 60-year old conflict is through a negotiated two-State solution. We must have renewed international efforts to support progress and to start serious negotiations towards a deal. The parties themselves must also resume negotiations to reach a durable ceasefire in Gaza and tackle the underlying causes of the conflict. The Palestinians need to take concrete steps towards moving the Palestinian Authority back to Gaza, starting with border crossings. Israel must support Gaza with exports, energy and water. Egypt needs to resume its mediation role and show flexibility in opening Rafah, and donors need to deliver on their pledges as soon as possible.

The regional turmoil we are witnessing only reinforces the importance of resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict. Both parties must think seriously about how they can work together to improve the reality on the ground. It is clear that comprises on the part of both parties are needed. Israel must stop its illegal and totally unnecessary settlement building, which seems designed to undermine a two-State solution. It should, instead, be easing economic conditions on the ground and removing barriers to Palestinian development.

Furthermore, while the Palestinians seek legal international roots to statehood, they must realize that there can be no substitute for negotiations with Israel. The United Kingdom sees merit in the Council adopting a clear resolution setting out the parameters for a peaceful and negotiated solution. That will require proper consultation to achieve the full backing of the Council.

As this is my final Middle East open debate, I would like to thank Council members, past and present, for their efforts on these issues over the past five years. But it is deeply regrettable that greater progress on Syria and the Middle East peace process has not been possible during this time. Much greater unity of purpose and more willingness for members to set aside their narrowly defined interests will be needed if we are to overcome these intractable issues in the future.

Mr. Barros Melet (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the presence of Minister Nasser Judeh, and extend our gratitude to the Jordanian presidency of the Security Council for April. We are grateful for the very thorough presentation given by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and greatly appreciate the recent appointment of Mr. Nickolay Mladenov as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. The impetus he provides will be very important to relaunching the peace process in the Middle East.

We find ourselves in a very disturbing time. New conflicts are having an impact on the region, and we find ourselves unable to resolve issues that have dragged on for decades. With regard to the issue of Palestine and Israel, the shared view is that the status quo is not acceptable; as a result, we believe that we should relaunch the peace process with defined parameters and within a specific time frame. The Security Council has a key role to play in this matter.

The two-State solution is still the best alternative for the Palestinian people to be able to exercise their

right to self-determination, and for Israel to enjoy security safeguards that would protect its existence. Political realism has shown time and again that it is not possible to maintain a negotiating process without considering these legitimate demands. We also need a commitment on the part of the parties, who must adopt confidence-building measures, comply with agreements and renounce extremist rhetoric. It is also crucial to respect international law, human rights, and international humanitarian law. A peace process is not viable while the Israeli settlement policy continues.

Palestine must also make progress in internal reconciliation, under the leadership of President Abbas. We would also like to make a special appeal to not disregard the humanitarian situation that affects the population living in the Gaza Strip. We should also properly address the harsh reality facing Palestinian refugees in the Yarmouk camp in Syria, who find themselves trapped in a conflict that is not their own.

With respect to Lebanon, we acknowledge the efforts of Prime Minister Salam to combat terrorism and strengthen State institutions under very difficult circumstances marked by a presidential power vacuum and the non-compliance of certain Lebanese actors with the disassociation policy established in the Baabda Declaration. This is a time to reiterate our gratitude for the many humanitarian gestures that Lebanon and other countries in the region, in particular Jordan, have shown toward Syrian refugees, who require protection as well as humanitarian assistance.

Finally, with respect to the Syrian crisis, the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2015/124) confirms that the conflict has spread with new levels of violence. We must urgently adopt measures to protect the most vulnerable population, as evidenced in the violence against women, boys and girls. Those responsible must be brought to account. Humanitarian action in itself will not be enough if there is no political solution. Dialogue is the only way to act responsibly and with a view towards the future. In that mission we support the work of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, and we eagerly await his report to the Security Council at the end of this week.

Mr. McLay (New Zealand): I thank you, Mr. President, for coming to New York to preside over today's debate. We are also grateful for Jordan's role in the region. As for your country's generosity in hosting

Syrian refugees, we feel that Jordan has been a positive force on the Middle East peace process.

Today I will focus my statement on Syria and the Middle East peace process. On Syria, there is a chorus calling for a political solution. With Yarmouk resembling a death camp and many parts of the country witnessing unimaginable human suffering, that call is as important now as it has ever been. It is also just as difficult to achieve.

We welcome the efforts of Special Envoy de Mistura to freeze the fighting in Aleppo. We will hear from him in a few days on how that proposal is progressing, but we understand that, given the modest possibilities, the prospects are not good. We also support the efforts of Russia and Egypt to reinvigorate a political track. However, it is important that all those efforts be coordinated under the United Nations umbrella and that they be based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

Until there is a political solution — and there must be one day a political and not a military solution — Syrians will suffer, and Minister Judeh's country of Jordan and Syria's other neighbours will strain under the refugee burden. As with the Middle East peace process, the Council should bring its significant experience with peace processes gained elsewhere to developing a lasting solution in Syria. We admit that it is difficult to apply experience from other situations to Syria; there are so many interests at stake and multiple parties to the conflict. However, of themselves, those differences are not unique; we encounter them in every situation. Moreover, we all know the broad outline of a political transition; it is set out in Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

Let us therefore talk about it. We should sit around a table and develop a plan for the next few months. The price of inaction is high, and it is being paid by ordinary Syrians. We would welcome the views of other Council members, but also those of others in the Chamber, many of whom are affected by the Syrian crisis. Permit me to pose a question to all who speak today, whether or not they are members of the Council. What would representatives propose as pragmatic, concrete next steps that the Council can take to alleviate the carnage in Syria? The Council is listening; certainly, it should be listening to those present.

On the Middle East peace process, I said in January that New Zealand supported in principle

the idea of a suitably balanced Security Council resolution, and I outlined the five points that guided New Zealand's approach to the Middle East peace process (see S/PV.7360). I said that the Council did not just have a responsibility to remain seized of the matter, it should also go further and actively promote negotiations leading to a just, sustainable, long-term peace agreement. Agreeing on a role for the Council is not going to be easy, but New Zealand believes that it is essential. We will also need to overcome the concerns of some who feel that the Council should not play a role at all.

While it is clearly for the parties to reach a final agreement, we believe that now is the time for the Council, with its primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, to use its moral and legal authority and the practical tools at its disposal to shift the dynamics back to productive negotiations. Again, that will not be easy. If it is to assume that role, the Council will have to form a collective opinion on issues that are sensitive, nuanced and weighed down with historical baggage. We must respect the significant investment that many countries have made over decades and the direct national interest of many States in the final outcome. We also need to convince stakeholders to take difficult, politically costly decisions in the interests of peace and long-term stability. That is not easy, but it is necessary. We will be told that it is not the right time, but it is always "not the right time". There will never be a perfect time. We cannot continue to kick the can down an endless road, as outgoing Special Coordinatorerry said in his briefing to us last month (see S/PV.7417). We all know that if the Council addresses only the symptoms and not the root causes of the conflict, there can be and will be no lasting peace.

It is our view that there is a finite window of opportunity for the Council to set that process in motion. In the January open debate (see S/PV.7360), New Zealand committed to exploring options for the Council to inject new momentum into those negotiations, once elections were concluded in Israel. That time has come. It is appropriate that the Council take action, now that those elections are over and before other election campaigns begin. New Zealand's friendships with Israel and with the Palestinians motivate us to make a constructive contribution and to work for progress. New Zealand wants the Security Council to focus on a practical outcome. We have therefore been working on a draft text that might serve the purpose of getting negotiations started. That is the important next step—to

get negotiations started. It will require that both sides step back from their optimum or preferred outcomes and that they both put any preconditions aside. There has already been reference to the fact that France is working with others on a parameters draft resolution. We know how difficult it will be to achieve nine votes in favour and no veto, but we remain convinced that the Council must discharge its responsibilities. We have not seen the latest French text, but if it has a chance of succeeding, New Zealand stands ready to engage and to be helpful.

Friends in the region have told us that a second text would complicate the process. Therefore, at this stage, New Zealand is prepared to wait to see how current efforts play out. But we firmly believe that for success and buy-in, it is important that any text be considered through an inclusive and transparent process. We must break the cycle that has undermined previous Council attempts to support the Middle East peace process. Therefore, New Zealand stands ready to work with all members to ensure that the next draft resolution that comes to the Council has a genuine chance of bringing the parties to the negotiating table.

Like the Ambassador of the United Kingdom, this is the last time I will speak in the Council's monthly debate on the situation in the Middle East. I would like therefore to add some further remarks.

I have talked today about the need for the Council and other stakeholders to get around the table to talk about Syria. As we sit here in New York, one must be struck by the fact that discussions in the Council are so formulaic and often disconnected from reality. We exist in a world of diplomatic niceties, carefully avoiding the elephants in the room, and usually, I might add, in a Chamber deliberately screened from the world. We endorse resolutions to protect civilians in Libya, but we cannot stop the salvo of barrel bombs in Syria. We talk of populations besieged in Syria, as we have today, but we find it much harder to talk about the same in Gaza. Even when we can discuss the most sensitive issues, key players are often left out of the discussion.

New Zealand is a strong believer in the United Nations and in the Security Council. We deeply appreciate that so many in the United Nations membership had the faith in us to elect us to the Council for a two-year term. In seeking that mandate, we promised we would say what we believe and that we would listen and consult with all. We meant what we said.

And so I end with a call for us all to deliver on our responsibility — our collective responsibility — to work together to end conflicts such as that in Syria and that between Israel and Palestine. We have the blueprints, including the Geneva communiqué for Syria (S/2012/522, annex), the decades of work and the known parameters for the Middle East peace process. We have said that we have the will. What is left is for this Council to find the way.

The President: I would like to thank the Permanent Representative of New Zealand for his service and to wish him the best of luck in the years to come, as I do for the representative of the United Kingdom. I thank them both for their invaluable contributions. We will all need their wisdom and wise counsel in the future and hope they will not be stinting with their advice.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (spoke in Spanish): At the outset, I would like to thank Minister Nasser Judeh for convening this debate. It is an honour to have him here. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his unceasing efforts to address the conflict in the Middle East.

My comments will focus on the peace process between Israel and Palestine, which lies at the heart of our concerns, but I will also refer to the situations in Syria and Yemen, given their dramatic impact, as well as to the need for support to Lebanon and to the ongoing threat that violent extremism poses to the region as a whole.

From the moment when the two-State solution began to be accepted almost 25 years ago as a result of the Madrid Peace Conference and the commitments undertaken by the parties, not only have we been unable to implement it, but we are on the verge of seeing it become an unattainable chimera. If there is a single clear message that should emerge from today's debate it is that there is no alternative to the two-State solution, which is the only one capable of guaranteeing comprehensive global peace based on respect for the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to establish their own State and of Israel to live in peace and security with its regional neighbours. That means, first of all, that we must all work to re-establish trust between the parties, which has gradually been worn away and damaged by decisions and events whose end result has been the absence of a common ground for dialogue. Trust cannot be restored without clear signs from both parties designed to help change their

perception of one another and to generate the climate necessary for the resumption of negotiations.

We must recognize that over the past few weeks both sides have gone out of their way to demonstrate that they hope to get their relations back on track. I trust that the new Government to emerge from the democratically expressed will of the Israel people will ratify that hope and that it will take the brave decisions that will signal a change in its policy concerning settlements on occupied territories, especially in the most sensitive areas. Similarly, I trust that the Palestinian Authority will be capable of meeting the challenges it faces by prioritizing the process of reconciliation and the establishment of an effective Government of national unity, which is the key to building a Palestinian State. Furthermore, we trust that the political will to commit to the peace process will take precedence over other possible routes, such as the legalization of the conflict.

Gaza demands its own mention. Despite a few minimal signs of progress at the logistical and operational levels, we are far from establishing the bases for promoting the profound transformation that the Strip requires. I would like to offer just one statistic. With an unemployment rate of more than 47 per cent, we must inevitably acknowledge that there will be no solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict if the population of Gaza does not have some hope for the future. To that end, we must all take responsibility; that includes the Palestinian authorities themselves, without whose reconciliation very little can be achieved; the authorities of Israel who, to be fair, are helping with the Reconstruction Mechanism but who must move ahead with lifting the blockade; and the international community, which must make good on its promises of financial aid.

What is to be done? Robert Serry outlined the path in his farewell remarks to the Council (see S/PV.7417). The solution must be comprehensive, not partial, and in order to achieve it there needs to be a new political framework that revives the peace process and stimulates dialogue between the parties. The goal is clear — the end of the occupation that began in 1967 and the creation of a democratic, economically viable Palestinian State whose existence will contribute to Israel's peace and security.

Many actors need to play key parts along the way to achieving that goal. The leadership of the United States has been and will remain crucial. The European Union

is also playing an essential role, and the regional focus is indispensable. The Arab countries, through the Arab Peace Initiative, must take the lead in the process. I am convinced, however, that the Security Council needs to take the greatest responsibility at this critical time. I would like to reiterate that the aim of all our efforts is to reach consensus among the members of the Council, as reflected in a resolution that brings together clear, comprehensive parameters as the basic framework for reviving peace negotiations. It will take time, effort and above all flexibility to achieve it, but only by providing clear evidence of the Council's resolve to pursue that goal will we be able to offer the Palestinians and Israelis the political vision that grows more necessary with each passing day.

The alternative is to do nothing or to do so little that we simply end up managing a failure — and by failure I mean a new intifada or a new conflict in Gaza, which would feed violent radicalism and be yet another open conflict in the region. That leads me to a second issue. As a matter of moral imperative and political responsibility, the Security Council must be involved in the fight to combat violent extremism in the Middle East and the protection of minorities and the most vulnerable populations. Any decision we adopt must that take into account.

With respect to Lebanon, Spain feels particularly close to that country and is firmly committed to Lebanese unity, stability and security. I take this opportunity to express my support to the Government and institutions of Lebanon, in particular to its armed forces. It is vital for the Lebanese political authorities to redouble their efforts to guarantee institutional continuity through the election of a new President. We are aware of the challenges involved in managing the Syrian humanitarian crisis. Precisely for that reason, we are working actively within the Security Council on the basis of a strategy to alleviate the impact on neighbouring countries that, like Lebanon, are suffering the consequences of the Syrian tragedy. I listened very closely to the President when he referred to the refugee problem in his country.

Concerning Syria, I await with great interest the information we are due to receive later this week from Staffan de Mistura, who enjoys our full support and trust. That will be a good moment to evaluate the political options and various efforts already under way, such as the discussions recently held in Moscow. But I cannot speak today of the situation in the Middle East

without reiterating our call on all parties to respect international humanitarian law and human rights. I call in particular on the Government in Damascus not to shirk its inescapable responsibility to protect its people from the atrocities being committed in that country.

The situation in Yarmouk is horrendous, but it should not surprise us. The continuous denial of access to humanitarian assistance for the inhabitants of the Yarmouk refugee camp, by both the Syrian regime and other armed groups, is intolerable. More than a year ago, through resolution 2139 (2014), the Council demanded an end to the siege of hundreds of thousands of people and a guarantee of immediate, unhampered access to humanitarian assistance, with respect the very basic principle of medical neutrality. Perhaps the moment has come for us to consider adopting further measures. The adoption of a press statement (SC/11865) yesterday is a good first step.

Finally, I want to mention the situation in Yemen. Last week, by adopting resolution 2216 (2015), we gave the Secretary-General 10 days to report on the degree of compliance with the Council provisions on Yemen. For now, the Houthis have continued their advance towards the south, openly defying the international community while severely worsening the humanitarian situation in the country. We fully support the efforts of the Secretary-General to seek a political solution in Yemen and welcome the new Special Envoy. However, if the Houthi defiance continues, the Council will have to take action; the very credibility of this organ is at stake.

Mrs. Ogwu (Nigeria): I would like to lend my voice to those who have welcomed you in our midst today, Mr. President. We believe that your presence at this debate is profoundly indicative of the prominence that Jordan accords the question of the Middle East. I also want to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

The prolonged stalemate in the Middle East process is impeding an early resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and causing considerable concern across the world, as you, Sir, must have heard today from the speakers. Indeed, the internal dynamics in Israel and Palestine appear to be stalling a return to negotiations. We encourage the leadership on both sides to demonstrate the necessary political will to allow for a resumption of negotiations in consonance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and other agreements between the parties.

At a meeting held in Munich in February, the Quartet called for a prompt resumption of talks between the parties. Nigeria endorses the position of the Quartet on the need for talks to take into account Israel's security concerns while respecting the aspirations of Palestine for statehood. Nigeria unequivocally reiterates its support for a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine existing side by side in peace and security, as the only basis for a final resolution of the question of Palestine.

In his final briefing to the Security Council as Special Coordinator last month (see S/PV.7417), Mr. Robert Serry urged the Council to take the lead and present a framework for negotiations between the parties. We share his view that such a course of action is the only viable way to preserve the goal of a two-State solution.

Nigeria is particularly concerned about the difficult humanitarian situation in Gaza occasioned by last summer's war. Much more remains to be done in the Gaza reconstruction effort, which has been largely hindered by an acute shortage of funds. Six months after a donor conference was held in Cairo, only a fraction of the funds pledged have been redeemed. We encourage donors to honour the pledges they made to expedite the reconstruction of Gaza.

United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) carrying out vital operations in Gaza need to be supported financially. UNRWA's activities have been severely constrained by a lack of funding. Greater commitment by donors would not only bolster the activities of UNRWA, but it would also facilitate its service delivery to needy Palestinians and prevent further deterioration in the dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Turning to Yemen, Nigeria is deeply concerned by the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the country. Reports indicate that over 250,000 refugees have been affected by the ongoing conflict. We note with appreciation that, despite the challenging circumstances, United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners continue to coordinate with the Yemeni Red Crescent and local authorities to deliver emergency assistance to those in dire need. We pay tribute to the humanitarian workers on the ground who sometime risk their lives in the course of fulfilling their duties.

A cessation of hostilities is vital to ameliorating the humanitarian situation in Yemen and restoring peace and stability to the country. Nigeria therefore urges the parties to the ongoing conflict to return to the political process. Ultimately, the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, as well as the outcome of the National Dialogue Conference involving all parties in Yemen, constitutes the most viable framework for sustainable peace in the country. Nigeria's wish for Yemen is a peaceful, prosperous, united and democratic country where cultural diversity will be a vital source of strength.

The President: I would remind all speakers to ensure that their statements do not exceed four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its business in a timely, efficient and expeditious manner. I would request that delegations with lengthy statements distribute those texts in the Chamber and speak within the allotted four-minute time frame. I would also request that speakers bear in mind that the speed of delivery of statements needs to be reasonable so that interpreters can follow them. I also wish to inform everyone concerned that, as we have a large number of speakers, we will proceed with today's open debate through the lunch hour.

(spoke in Arabic)

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) *(spoke in Arabic):* I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for coming to New York to preside over today's meeting. I would also like to congratulate your Mission, Sir, for assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month and to thank you for all your suggestions on our work.

(spoke in English)

Let us first admit that the main facts pertaining to the Middle East conflict have all become increasingly alarming and that the situation is now deteriorating in an unprecedented manner. Suffice it here to recall the following.

With 2,314 Palestinians and 97 Israelis killed, the year 2014 witnessed the highest civilian death toll since 1967, due to the July/August hostilities in Gaza and a significant increase in Palestinian fatalities in the West Bank. In 2014, Gaza also witnessed the highest rate of internal displacement since 1967. Some 28 per cent of its population was internally displaced at the height

of the hostilities. It is true that since the ceasefire was announced on 26 August the majority of internally displaced persons returned home, but shelter needs remain enormous, as up to 18,000 families no longer have homes to return to.

Also in 2014, the number of people displaced in the West Bank and East Jerusalem due to the demolition of homes and property was the highest recorded in a single year since the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs began tracking this indicator in 2008. Moreover, in 2014, the Israeli Government set a 10-year record for the number of tenders issued for settlement construction in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and construction starts increased in 2014 by 40 per cent over the previous year. We cannot fail to mention that 2014 witnessed the collapse of the United States-sponsored peace efforts, mainly due to Israel's political intransigence, its refusal to honour its commitment to release Palestinian prisoners and its aggressive policy of settlement expansion.

Mr. Hmoud took the Chair.

In 2015, however, worse was to come when the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, said loud and clear during his electoral campaign that if he were to be re-elected, a Palestinian State would not be established "on his watch". Moreover, he vowed to increase settlement construction in East Jerusalem by adding "thousands of housing units". On election day, in a notorious racist statement, he warned Arab citizens of Israel against voting "in droves".

Naftali Bennett, Minister of Economy in Netanyahu's Government, was in turn loud and clear on rejecting the establishment of a Palestinian State by saying that "the notion of injecting a State, dividing Jerusalem, dividing up the country and splitting and slicing it, is not sustainable". In the same racist vein as Netanyahu, in one of his infamous speeches, he also suggested that Arabs were simply "thieves". Let us not forget that for Avigdor Liberman, Israel's Foreign Minister, the solution to "disloyal" Israeli Arabs was simple: "We need to pick up an ax" and behead them.

The situation in our part of the world is indeed becoming more and more difficult, but this is no excuse for inaction. On the contrary, the more difficult a conflict situation becomes, the greater the Council's responsibility. As a matter of fact, to be meaningful, any resumption of negotiations on the Middle East conflict should be based on well-defined parametres. A new

comprehensive international framework and clear and agreed-upon deadlines are also needed for the success of such negotiations. Accordingly, the Council is called upon to shoulder its responsibilities in maintaining peace and security by addressing these critical issues sooner rather than later.

Mr. President, do not let the situation deteriorate any further. It is time for action.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, please allow me to congratulate Minister Nasser Judeh and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for its presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. I would also like to thank the President for convening this meeting at this crucial stage of the history of the Middle East, when recent events have taken place that threaten the existence of certain States in general, and Palestine in particular. I am sure that the professionalism of the Jordanian Mission and the keen commitment of Jordan to defend Arab causes during the past year or so has made our Jordanian colleagues capable of guiding us towards establishing comprehensive peace in the Middle East. I would also like to extend my congratulations to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov on his appointment as United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. I wish him every success. He enjoys our full support in this difficult task.

I said that the establishment of peace in the Middle East was a difficult endeavour. Everybody knows that. Numerous and serious challenges exist, and in certain circumstances we feel that such issues are very difficult to overcome. That might jeopardize the two-State solution. We hear sceptic voices here and there rejecting this solution as a basis for a comprehensive settlement. Several times, over many decades, the international community has demonstrated that a lack of political will prevails in achieving such a settlement. Recently, last December, this happened in this very Council. The international failure is actually a threat to international peace and security. The Palestinian people have become convinced that perhaps the sole purpose of the talks is to continue without the parties having any genuine intention of establishing two States living side by side in peace and as good neighbours. In Egypt we say that the failure to establish peace in the Middle East is not an option, and in that regard there is continued despair.

That will turn the occupied Palestinian territories into a fertile ground for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and terrorist organizations to prosper, thereby increasing the sufferings of the Palestinian people.

Indeed, we see how the Palestinians have been victims of ISIL's atrocious acts in the Yarmouk Camp. All other countries, including Israel, are facing multiple threats. That should be an incentive for Israel to embark upon serious endeavours to establish peace. After six decades of this ongoing crisis, we are fed up of the wasted opportunities. The world at large has seen that certain opportunities have been wasted. We are all responsible for ensuring the same mistakes are not repeated after rounds and rounds of useless talks. As Mr. Robert Serry said in his recent briefing (see S/PV.7417), the peace process was akin to a can that is kicked down an endless road. The international community should not stand by and just watch one party that is not willing to establish such a settlement. Let us build on the commendable efforts, especially those made through the Arab Peace Initiative at the twenty-sixth ordinary session of the Council of the League of Arab States, held in Sharm El-Sheikh, which issued resolution 614. Paragraph 3 of the resolution mandates the Arab Ministers to continue their consultations with the Security Council, the United States Administration, the Russian Federation, China and the European Union in order to continue to try and establish peace.

What do we need and what are we waiting for to end the occupation and establish peace? We have witnessed the erosion of the lofty aims on which the United Nations was established long ago. We would like to commend the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for the efforts it has exerted. I would also like to refer to the commendable efforts by France to move forward, its urging the Security Council to extend its support for the peace process and indeed for introducing a draft resolution for the reactivation of the peace process. The Arab Republic of Egypt, in its capacity as the Chair of the Arab committee mandated to follow up on the Arab plan to end the Israeli occupation, would like to urge everyone to cooperate. Indeed, Gaza is part and parcel of the Palestinian territories. I would like to request all the parties that participated in the Cairo international conference on Palestine and reconstructing Gaza to provide the necessary assistance.

The crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic is now entering its fifth year. There can be no solution other

than a political one, based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), under which the integrity of the Syrian territories is to be preserved. I would like to reiterate that Egypt will continue its efforts to provide the necessary political support to all Syrian parties willing to come to an agreement.

Once again, Egypt calls for an end to the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights, in accordance with resolution 242 (1967).

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great honour to speak on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and its member States.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate the President, for presiding over the Security Council this month. We wish you every success in your task. I would also like to congratulate the Jordanian presidency for its excellent performance over the past few weeks. We also thank the presidency for inviting us to take part in this important discussion with regard to the situation in the Middle East. I would also like to thank His Excellency the Minister for Foreign and Expatriates Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for his statement, and the Secretary-General for his briefing.

First of all, on behalf of the member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, I would like to welcome the decision of the State of Palestine to officially join the International Criminal Court. We look forward to Palestine becoming a full-fledged Member of the United Nations, thereby achieving part of the justice that Palestine has been deprived of over the past few decades. Palestine's joining the International Criminal Court is a very important and natural step in that regard. However, it is also very important for Palestine to establish a framework of accountability for those in charge of the Israeli occupation of Palestine and responsible for the confiscation of Palestinian tax revenues, the blockade against Gaza and the hunger and war in Gaza, as well as other violations committed by Israel against Palestine.

That brave step comes within the framework of the obdurate practices carried out by Israel, which has refused to honour its commitments. It violates international law and impedes all negotiations aimed at reaching a settlement of the issue. In fact, the Israeli

Prime Minister has rejected the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. Therefore, we would like to call upon all the countries of the world to honour their commitments to support Palestine and acknowledge the State of Palestine based on the borders of 4 June 1967, with Jerusalem as its capital.

The OIC is committed to the basic rights of the Palestinian people, as well as to their self-determination, their rights and the establishment of an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital. The OIC stresses the importance of putting an end to the occupation by Israeli troops of Arab territory, as well as the Syrian Golan Heights and Lebanese territory. We call upon the international community to put an end to the Israeli occupation and to achieve a peace based on the two-State solution.

Israel is stubbornly imposing its oppressive and racist policies on Palestine. The statements of the Israeli Prime Minister during the recent Israeli elections confirmed the Israeli policies of building settlements and the racist wall, as well as the use of extreme violence by Israeli troops against peaceful demonstrators. Israel is carrying out a policy of deporting and intimidating Palestinian people, in addition to other policies based on impunity. Israeli troops have detained a number of Palestinians, including members of Parliament, such as Ms. Khalida Jarrar, without charges. The OIC has condemned the serious threats and terrorist activities carried out by Israeli terrorist settlers against the Palestinian people under occupation.

In February, the Al-Huda mosque in Bethlehem and a building affiliated with the Greek Orthodox church in Jerusalem were destroyed. We condemn those attacks on Islamic and Christian places of worship.

The OIC holds Israel fully responsible for all those horrendous acts against the Palestinian people, because Israel brought the terrorist settlers into the occupied territory. We call upon all the leaders of the international community to place them on the list of terrorist groups.

The situation in the Gaza Strip is deteriorating as a result of the Israeli blockade and aggression last summer, in which more than 2,000 Palestinians were killed. Because of that aggression, the humanitarian organizations working in Gaza are suffering from a shortage of funding. We must therefore support those who are working in the humanitarian field. The OIC calls upon the international community to give generous

donations to the Palestinian people and those who are supporting them.

We call upon the Council to demand that Israel put an end to its inhumane blockade against Gaza and to implement resolution 1860 (2009) with regard to the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza without impediments. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation calls upon the Security Council to put an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people and to protect Palestinian civilians.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation welcomed the convening of the parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention on 17 December 2014. We would like to reiterate that those parties are obliged to force Israel and its occupying troops to respect the Fourth Geneva Convention and to implement it in Palestine, including in Jerusalem. In fact, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, during his briefing before the Council last month (see S/PV.7417), asked if it was time for the Security Council to take the leading role. We would like to pose the same question. We must move towards achieving the aspirations of the Palestinian people and the independence of its State, based on the borders of 4 June 1967, with Jerusalem as its capital. We must also achieve a resolution of the issue of the Palestinian refugees, according to the internationally legitimate resolutions.

I would like to continue my statement in my national capacity by stressing that the situation in Syria, after four years of conflict, is the largest catastrophe of the century. In fact, the Syrian authorities continue to perpetrate crimes against the Syrian people and to use chemical weapons against civilians. They cooperated with terrorist organizations in order to carry out a massacre in Yarmouk refugee camp, which reached the level of a genocide against the Palestinian refugees. They are impeding access of humanitarian relief into the occupied territory. In fact, the Security Council has committed to taking measures in cases where chemical weapons are used by any party and to punishing any party that hampers the delivery of humanitarian assistance. However, such threats, unless actually implemented, will do no justice to the people but will cast doubt on the integrity and credibility of the Security Council and help the Syrian authorities to pursue their practices. Indeed, the practices of the Syrian authorities have helped the terrorist groups to expand in Syria.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia stresses its condemnation of terrorism in all its forms, regardless of the perpetrators. We also note stress that terrorism is transnational and that, in order to uproot it, we need to address the main causes that have led to its spread, including the practices of the Syrians authorities leading to suppression, chaos and sectarian sedation. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has shown its ability to take firm decisions and support our brothers. We will spare no effort in helping the Syrian people to achieve their aspirations to dignity and freedom in a way that preserves the territorial integrity of Syria and respects the rights of people in Syria. We call on the Security Council to implement the relevant resolutions, including the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), calling for the establishment of a transitional governing body in order to put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people.

In conclusion, the Israeli Ambassador's statement regarding the attack on Gaza and the support of the Arab countries for the Palestinian people reflects a double standard. It seems as if he wants only to highlight what Israeli authorities have done in suppressing and oppressing the Palestinian people in recent weeks. In fact, the acceptance of such practices has to come to an end. It is now time for the Security Council to prove to Israel that it is not above the law.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Guilherme de Aguiar Patriota (Brazil): I thank the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for convening this important open debate. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing. Brazil also wishes to acknowledge the interventions of the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Deputy Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine.

About a month ago in this Chamber, Mr. Robert Serry shared his thoughts as the outgoing Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. His message could not be clearer, nor could it be more frustrating: "the parties are heading towards an outcome which I can only describe as a one-State reality" (S/PV.7417, p. 4). Those were his words. Indeed, that is what we have been witnessing in the past years, in particular after the failure of three peace talks initiatives, all followed by tragic wars in Gaza and the expansion of settlement activities.

In the past months, statements by the Israeli leadership to the effect that there is no prospect for a Palestinian State in the near future were appalling. Such statements can only fuel the cycle of confrontation and mistrust, exacerbate the situation on the ground and lead us farther away from peace. The international community must take all necessary measures to bring about a renewed negotiating process that will lead to a two-State solution.

The international community cannot allow for the current circumstances to be taken as normal. A clear message against business-as-usual is urgently needed. As Brazil has repeatedly pointed out, it remains the primary responsibility of the Security Council to play its role in developing a new peace architecture for ending the conflict. We call on the Security Council to exercise its responsibility and actively set the parameters for the relaunching of the peace process.

Brazil welcomes the entry into force for Palestine of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The accession of the State of Palestine to the Rome Statute represents an important step towards the universality of the ICC, positively contributing to the fight against impunity and to the promotion of lasting peace and reconciliation. Once again, we reiterate that the resort to multilateral mechanisms should not be met with reprisals and sanctions.

Brazil is deeply disturbed by the realization that we have entered the fifth year of the conflict cruelly ravaging Syria, a nation to which we feel deeply connected to due to the presence of many of its nationals and descendants in our country. The drastic deterioration in the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp is a stark reminder that the situation can get even worse. We strongly condemn the killings and serious human rights violations perpetrated by the so-called Islamic State and the Al-Nusra Front in the Yarmouk camp. We firmly support the efforts by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to provide all necessary assistance.

Brazil urges all parties to the conflict to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, to provide unhindered access to humanitarian agencies and to refrain from any action that could protract the conflict any longer.

As Brazil has consistently reiterated, there is no military solution for the conflict in Syria. It is the responsibility of all countries to prevent further

militarization of the conflict, and to push for genuine dialogue with a view to finding a political solution to the conflict. Brazil has been contributing with food and medicine to help alleviating the dire humanitarian situation of Syrian refugees and dislocated people.

The need for the enhanced engagement of all parties in political negotiations in Syria cannot be overstated. We reiterate our support for the work of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, as well as to the International Inquiry Commission headed by Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheiro. A genuine and inclusive dialogue, based on full respect for human rights, the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, is as urgent as ever. Brazil welcomes the second round of intra-Syrian talks, held in Moscow, as an important step towards the re-launch of the political process.

The security and stability in Lebanon is a matter of great concern. The recent escalation of violence reinforces the need to fully support the Lebanese policy of disassociation from regional crises agreed in the Baabda Declaration of June 2012. We firmly support Lebanon in its fight against terrorism and in its pursuit of stability and development. Our participation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, whose Maritime Task Force has been led by a Brazilian officer since 2011, plays a prominent role in translating our commitment into practical actions. Brazil also contributes to strengthening the Lebanese Armed Forces by training Lebanese navy cadets at the Brazilian Navy School in Rio de Janeiro.

Brazil is encouraged by some of the latest developments concerning the internal political processes and national reconciliation efforts in Iraq. We are, however, very concerned by the security and humanitarian situation in the country, particularly the control of the so-called Islamic State of extensive parts of the Iraqi territory and its implications for the entire region. We believe that a strategy focused only on military operations will not be able to address the root causes that led to the proliferation of terrorism and religious extremism in the country.

Allow me to say a few words on Yemen. Brazil is deeply concerned about the escalation of the conflict in Yemen. We urge all parties to cease hostilities, refrain from violence and resume dialogue in order to peacefully resolve their differences. We are alarmed by the severe deterioration of the humanitarian situation, particularly the reports of hundreds of civilians killed

or wounded, including many children. All the parties have an obligation to protect civilians and respect international humanitarian and human rights law. We urge the countries of the region to use their influence to bring the parties to the negotiating table and engage them in seeking a diplomatic solution. We thank Special Adviser Jamal Benomar for his tireless efforts, and are fully confident that the United Nations will join forces to pursue a negotiated solution.

The stakes in Yemen are too high. The political stabilization of the country is urgent if we are to bring about a halt to the violence, suffering and destruction affecting civilians and to pave the way for humanitarian assistance. That is also crucial to preventing the further proliferation of religious extremism and terrorism. We support the Security Council in its efforts to act decisively in order to help Yemen fully restore security and stability.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I speak today as the representative of one of the main parties concerned in the item on today's agenda.

How is it possible, in the twenty-first century, for the United Nations to accept Israel's continued occupation — an occupation that is military, racist and colonial, an occupation that involves heinous crimes and violations and supports terrorism? How can we continue to allow the United Nations to fail to uphold its legal and historic responsibility for ending the Israeli occupation that has plagued our lands for more than half a century? That is despite the fact that the Organization has adopted hundreds of resolutions calling for an end to this racist, colonizing occupation that bears a strong resemblance to apartheid. Do we need more commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions, expert groups and quartets to convince us of the gravity of the Israeli occupation? The United Nations is being severely tested. If we want to maintain what is left of its credibility, some countries will have to end their policies of hypocrisy, double standards and trafficking in their peoples' interests. Member States must act with deeds rather than words by taking practical measures that can force Israel to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions, so that we can put an end this colonizing occupation and the unprecedented tragic suffering that Arab citizens have endured for decades in the Syrian Golan and other occupied Arab territories.

There are those among us who should not deceive themselves and the rest of the world by continuing to provide excuses and justifications for Israel's policies. We are all well aware that successive Israeli Governments have never cared about peace but have been eager to continue with their policies of occupation, settlement and aggression. They have occupied and annexed the Syrian Golan and Palestinian Jerusalem. They have committed crimes of aggression and war against humanity; they have killed United Nations envoys and peacekeepers; they have attacked Christian and Muslim religious sites and are now trying to Judaize the State. Israel's current Prime Minister has stated clearly that he rejects a two-State solution. In 1991, Israel's former Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir said in a statement on the margins of the Madrid Conference that the Israeli delegation had instructions simply to keep the talks going for 10 years in order to buy time. It is shocking that here in the Security Council there are those who would deny Palestinians their most basic rights, including the right to establish a State on their national territory and to set a deadline for ending the Israeli occupation. They continue to support Israel economically, diplomatically and politically. They continue to guarantee its military superiority and acquisition of nuclear weapons, as well as protecting it from any accountability.

Israel has occupied the Syrian Golan since 1967. It has imposed a bitter reality on Syrian citizens there that must be ended by every possible means guaranteed under international law. The United Nations must therefore shoulder its responsibility for dealing with that reality with full seriousness and through the implementation of the relevant resolutions, particularly Security Council resolution 497 (1981). Israel must end its systematic and grave violations of human rights. There should be an end to the policies of settlement, terrorism, repression, racial discrimination and theft of the Golan's natural resources, including water, oil and gas, as well as halting the arbitrary arrests of Syrian citizens. In that regard, we urge the Secretary-General and the Security Council to exert the humanitarian efforts needed to force Israel to release all Syrian detainees, most importantly the Nelson Mandela of Syria, Sedqi Al-Maqet, who was arrested again in February for no reason except his documentation of the relationship of Israel's occupation forces with terrorist groups in the area of separation in the Syrian Golan. He was imprisoned in Israeli detention centres for 27 years on no legal grounds, simply because he would

not renounce his allegiance to Syria and refused to carry an Israeli identity card.

There is international silence around such Israeli practices. Israel has violated the 1974 Separation of Forces Agreement, endangered the lives of staff of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and undermined UNDOF's mandate by supporting terrorist groups in the area of separation, including Jabhat Al-Nusra, which is linked to Al-Qaida, including by providing such groups with all kinds of logistical support, even treating their injured members in Israeli hospitals. We therefore demand that this grave issue receive serious and immediate attention. The Secretariat and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations have ignored it, and there can be no justification for that.

In that regard, I would like to point out that it is clear to all of us that some speakers' misleading statements are designed only to fabricate areas of contention in order to distract the Security Council's attention, reduce pressure on Israel and mask the fact that Israel has rejected a two-State solution and the entire peace process. To the representatives of the United Kingdom and the United States, I say here that they must stop their hypocrisy and lies. If they are concerned about the situation of Palestinian refugees, they should not support Israel, which constitutes the main reason for the ordeal that those refugees have endured since 1948. They are partners in creating and continuing that ordeal, whether inside or outside Syria. They have used the veto dozens of times in order to protect Israel's failure to implement the right of return under General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Syria has taken in those refugees, considering them to be its brothers and sisters, welcoming them and treating them with the same generosity we show to Syrians, and we will continue to make every effort to protect them from the terrorism supported by the United States, the United Kingdom and other regional and Arab States, until they can return to their homeland in occupied Palestine.

Finally, the representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia used shameful and unacceptable words to refer to my country. I will not address his political incitement, which is based not on information but on ignorance. He has forgotten that this item on the agenda concerns the Palestinian question, and he has been doing a service to the Government of Israel and its allies. Zionism and Saudi Arabia are at the root of terrorism, fanaticism and the culture of hatred in the world. It is the culture of

the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. The culture of beheading is a culture from Jahili times; it is takfiri, Wahhabi and it comes from Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia's policies have sowed the seeds of sectarian sedition in the region. It will pay the price for that mistake. The threats made by its representative against my country and his claims that Saudi Arabia is ready to help the Syrian people only confirm that the hands of his country's rulers are red with Syrian blood and that they are deeply involved in funding, harbouring and supporting Wahhabi terrorists. Saudi Arabia sends mercenaries from all over the world to Syria so that they can undermine its stability.

Saudi Arabia continues to be the centre of the culture of hatred and sectarianism. It is very much like Zionist Israel. If the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia really has the authority to threaten my country as he just did, then I shall test him now. I ask him, before all present, to show us what he can do against my country. We will cut off any hand that tries to hurt Syria; the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will receive the punishment that it deserves.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Mr. Carrera Castro (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, the delegation of Guatemala would like to welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jordan, Mr. Nasser Judeh, and to thank him warmly for being so actively involved at the beginning of this debate. We also wish to congratulate the delegation of Jordan for its exemplary leadership and the work that it has undertaken throughout the month of April in exercise of the office of the presidency of the Security Council. The Ambassador of Jordan is a great personal friend, and we hope to be able to meet up with her again on Thursday and Friday.

We also have taken due note of the statement made by the Secretary-General on recent developments in the Middle East, a region in which various countries find themselves racked by instability and conflict. The fallout of the violence in the region has been disastrous for the civilian population, and, as my delegation noted in this very Chamber last month, we are particularly concerned by the plight of the many ethnic and religious communities that are under serious threat.

The international community has borne witness to how violence, fundamentalism, intolerance, exclusion and the tearing apart of the very fabric of society have

come to exemplify the characteristics of a political and social model that is no longer viable. For that reason, we must redouble our efforts to encourage leaders in the region to respect human rights and forge a better future for their peoples.

Since the suspension of the latest rounds of peace talks in April 2014, we have seen a rapid deterioration in the situation between Israel and Palestine, which means that the desired two-State solution seems increasingly difficult to achieve. For that reason, it is important that we put together a political timeline that responds to the legitimate needs of both peoples and that will lead to a definitive and just settlement. It is for this reason that the international community must play an active role in supporting and promoting the peace process.

We acknowledge the value of the principle of shared responsibility, and for that reason we believe that the active participation of both the diplomatic Quartet on the Middle East and the Security Council in the peace process could generate new momentum, so that the parties can take responsible steps towards a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

In this regard, we encourage a dialogue on the Arab Peace Initiative, with its vision of a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, and on the vital role that could be played by the countries of the region and the Security Council.

The parties must shy away from adopting measures that would further hinder prospects for the relaunching of meaningful talks. We believe that it is the parties to conflict themselves that must make real and renewed efforts that would include, inter alia, a complete lifting of the blockade, a halt to the construction of illegal settlements, and abstaining from provocative actions and from the launching of rockets, with the objective of meeting the legitimate security concerns of Israel.

It is essential that the parties build mutual trust and commit to dialogue on peace and to the two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security, adopting measures aimed at rebuilding mutual trust and confidence.

We welcome the announcement of an agreement under which Israel has agreed to release tax revenues collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, as this is an important step towards the rebuilding of trust between both parties. The withholding of that income for more than four months has had a deeply destabilizing effect on Palestinian institutions, particularly as

concerns their ability to pay salaries in the public sector and provide essential services to the population.

Additionally, Guatemala strongly supports the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and in that context we deem positive the entry into force of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court for Palestine. We are firm advocates for the universality of the Court and believe that this step reflects the full commitment of the State of Palestine to work towards a system of accountability and respect for human rights, elements that can only serve to help pave the path to peace for both parties.

The crisis in Syria, which is entering its fifth year, continues in a spiral of violence and destruction. We categorically condemn the human rights violations committed by all parties. We are aware of the tremendous efforts undertaken by the United Nations, particularly through the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to respond to the devastating impact of this conflict, but the international community also has a role to play. We reiterate the urgent need to rekindle the political process, and we believe, therefore, that any effort towards a peaceful settlement between the parties is valuable and should enjoy our support. We also commend the efforts undertaken by the Special Envoy, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to deal with the Syrian conflict.

The international community, in particular the members of the Security Council, must overcome their differences and seek new ways of reducing violence, alleviating the suffering of the population and creating the necessary conditions conducive to the resumption of negotiations.

We are particularly concerned about the humanitarian situation in Syria. Essential services such as health care, education and sanitation are at a breaking point, and the current assistance being provided to support these systems is not sufficient. Any humanitarian aid that can be provided is vital for restoring political stability in the region.

Against that backdrop, we would like to note the invaluable support lent by the Governments and peoples of those countries that have given refuge to thousands of Syrian refugees, thus shouldering an undue and heavy burden. Here we pay particular tribute to the role of Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Egypt in that regard.

We condemn all attacks on refugee camps. It is vital that all parties to the conflict protect the civilian population and permit regular and ongoing humanitarian access to affected populations. We are firmly convinced that it is the State that bears the primary responsibility to protect the civilian population and that in no circumstances can it violate the rights of said population, in particular through recourse to violent means. It is necessary to ensure that any serious crimes that have been committed from the very beginning of this conflict do not go unpunished. The Syrian people deserve accountability.

We are aware of the tremendous challenges that the quest for a political solution poses to the parties to the conflict, both nationally and internationally, but this is the only option open to us. It is our political and historical responsibility, as States members of the international community, to support all of the steps that might help us to achieve the goal of peace.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Safaei (Islamic Republic of Iran): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

I wish to convey to you, Mr. President, the Movement's appreciation for the convening of this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, at this critical juncture for Palestine, the Palestinian people and the international community. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

The Non-Aligned Movement takes this opportunity to once again reaffirm its long-standing solidarity with the Palestinian people. It also reiterates its support for the realization of the Palestinian people's legitimate national aspirations and inalienable rights, including to self-determination and freedom in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution for the plight of the Palestinian refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

NAM stresses the urgency of achieving a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and calls for the exertion of serious efforts by all the parties concerned to realize this long-overdue

objective. A peaceful solution to the question of Palestine remains a priority on the Movement's agenda. The year 2014, which had been proclaimed by the General Assembly as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, has passed, and yet the suffering and injustice borne by the Palestinian people continues. Israeli intransigence and illegal policies continue to undermine the resumption of credible negotiations and to obstruct the achievement of a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We express our grave concern regarding the consequent deterioration of the situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and stress that the status quo is unsustainable. The situation requires immediate attention by the international community.

Despite decades of good-faith participation in peace efforts and a clear commitment by the Palestinian people and their leadership to international law, which was reaffirmed by the recent accession by the State of Palestine to several international conventions and treaties, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the Palestinian plight and predicament have worsened on all fronts. That is due directly to illegal Israeli policies and practices, which have entrenched the occupation and undermined all peace efforts to the point casting the viability of the two-State solution into grave doubt.

The situation deteriorated dramatically, and the brutalization of the Palestinian people reached a new apex, when the Israeli military aggression waged against the besieged and blockaded Gaza Strip in July and August 2014. Israel has not been held accountable for those crimes, despite the fact that the occupying forces launched tens of thousands of missiles, bombs, artillery shells and live ammunition against the defenseless Palestinian civilian population. NAM continues to call for accountability for all of those violations and crimes. Moreover, we urge the international community to fulfil pledges made at the Cairo conference on Palestine to accelerate reconstruction in the Gaza Strip and to provide the Palestinian people with the humanitarian assistance urgently needed to alleviate their suffering. We also reiterate the call for an end to the Israeli blockade of Gaza and the inhumane isolation of the Palestinian people there.

NAM also reiterates its strong condemnation of Israel's continuing and escalating settlement construction throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around occupied East

Jerusalem, in grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and United Nations resolutions, including of the Council. Those and other systematic violations, including the demolition of homes, the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, the arrest and detention of Palestinians, including children, and the incessant violence, terror and provocation by Israeli settlers and extremists, including at sensitive religious Muslim and Christian sites, particularly the Al-Aqsa Mosque, have worsened conditions on the ground, inflicted grave hardships on the Palestinian people, further fragmented their land and contributed to the destruction of the viability of the two-State solution. Moreover, all such illegal Israeli policies and practices deepen the already serious doubts that prevail regarding Israel's claimed commitment to the two-State solution and peace — claims that have been further undermined by the blatant and shocking anti-peace, anti-two-State solution declarations by Israeli officials, including in the recent election campaign.

We have all acknowledged that the situation is unsustainable and that this unjust situation cannot be allowed to continue. The Security Council cannot remain on the sidelines as the international community continues to seek a just and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine, especially when the situation continues to deteriorate so dramatically and threatens complete destabilization. NAM therefore urges the Security Council to act forthwith, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, and to undertake resolute action towards ending the Israeli occupation and the decades-long injustice against the Palestinian people.

We regret that, contrary to the overwhelming international consensus in that regard, as reflected in the vote of 181 Member States in the General Assembly in support of the right of Palestinian people to self-determination and freedom and the many other declarations from around the globe, including Government, inter-governmental and non-governmental organization and parliament appeals for an end to this prolonged conflict, in 2014 the Security Council failed to shoulder its responsibilities and meaningfully contribute to a peaceful solution in the Middle East.

NAM believes that the message is loud and clear worldwide: it is time to end the abhorrent Israeli occupation and impunity that has brought about so much suffering, caused so many crises, sown so much instability and anger throughout the Middle East, and

that continues to undermine regional and global peace and security. In addition to the annual resolutions of the General Assembly, that message was also been strongly reaffirmed in the recent Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, hosted by Switzerland in its capacity as depositary State. That message has also been and continues to be reaffirmed by the appeals launched by numerous European Parliaments calling for recognition of the State of Palestine, and the fact that 135 countries already recognize the State of Palestine.

United Nations States Members have conferred upon the Security Council the primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security, and we strongly urge the Council to act to uphold its own responsibilities towards the question of Palestine with full recognition of the implications that will have for peace and security in the Middle East and beyond. Today, NAM calls, and will continue to call, upon the Security Council to act in accordance with its Charter duties, and stresses the important role to be played in that regard by NAM caucus members.

Lebanon continues to suffer from consecutive Israeli violations of its borders and incursions against its territory, followed by years of occupation and aggression. Unfortunately, Israel still continues to violate Lebanese airspace and to intensify its incursions over Lebanon. Such activities are blatant violations of Lebanese sovereignty and the relevant international resolutions, in particular resolution 1701 (2006), the provisions of which should be implemented in a manner that guarantees the consolidation of the foundations of stability and security in Lebanon and prevents Israel from undertaking its daily violations of Lebanese sovereignty.

Finally, with regard to the occupied Syrian Golan, the Movement condemns all the measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, which have intensified after the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. The Non-Aligned Movement once again demands that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mminele (South Africa): Let me to join others, Mr. President, in congratulating you and your country on Jordan's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We also wish to thank the President for convening this important debate.

For many years, South Africa has called for increased engagement by the Council on the question of Palestine, as we hold the view that the Council has an obligation to step in to end impunity on the ground and to move the stalled peace process forward. We express our appreciation to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his important briefing. At this time, we wish to express our gratitude to Mr. Robert Serry for his years of service and for his work in trying to resolve one of the world's most intractable conflicts. My delegation welcomes the appointment of Mr. Nickolay Mladenov as the new Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of Secretary-General to the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. We wish him every success in carrying out his duties and assure him of our strong support for his work.

Mrs. Kwararick seizes the Chair.

South Africa associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

In his last briefing to the Council (see S/PV.7417), Mr. Serry recalled that, during his tenure in office, three United States-led peace initiatives remained inconclusive and did not bring us closer to the urgently needed peace agreement based on the two-State solution. Moreover, all three stalled negotiations were followed by wars in Gaza, leaving the Strip devastated and worsening the humanitarian situation on the ground. That led Mr. Serry to call for a new strategy to be adopted by the United States and the international community to prioritize the situation in Gaza. He also urged the Security Council to take the lead and to present a framework for the negotiations to the parties. He expressed the belief that it would be the only way to preserve and achieve the two-State solution. Mr. Serry cautioned that the situation on the ground was developing towards a one-State "solution", which is not a solution.

South Africa believes that the time to act is long overdue. The illegal Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip continues to inflict grave suffering to the lives

of 1.8 million Palestinians, worsening the already pervasive humanitarian crisis. We reiterate our deep concern that the solution envisioned by the Oslo Accords more than 20 years ago is being taken apart piecemeal with every new settlement that is announced. The settlements are not only illegal under international law, but also remain a major stumbling block to the achievement of sustainable peace.

Essentially, the Israeli settlement activities are confiscating Palestinian territory essential for a future State and aim to isolate East Jerusalem from other main Palestinian cities, thus seriously threatening the very achievement of the two-State solution in line with the overwhelming call for the creation of a sovereign, independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian State coexisting peacefully alongside the State of Israel on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We again call on Israel to immediately stop its settlement activities as an obligation under various Security Council resolutions and international law. Moreover, Israel's actions in Gaza also constitute a violation of international humanitarian law, including article 23 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and violate resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1515 (2003) and 1860 (2009).

To date, the Security Council has failed to hold Israel responsible for its violations of Council decisions, thereby enabling Israel's impunity. The dire situation is punctuated by provocations and attacks against the holy sites in East Jerusalem, by the violent response to peaceful protests by Palestinians and by attacks by illegal settlers against Palestinian communities. We recently witnessed the effect of those attacks, with individual Palestinians retaliating. South Africa reiterates its condemnation of all forms of violence, including that perpetrated by individuals, as detrimental to the teetering peace process.

South Africa welcomes the announcement by Israel and Palestine on Saturday, 18 April, that an agreement had been reached to release hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenues and customs duties withheld from the Palestinian Authority since the beginning of the year. We hope that the agreement will be implemented without delay. We reiterate that withholding tax revenue is illegal collective punishment in response to Palestine's accession to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and to other international agreements and organizations. We believe that, as a State, Palestine has the right to join whatever

organizations it pleases, and we will support Palestine's membership application to the United Nations, which has stalled in the Council.

South Africa looks forward to the release of the report of the Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry established to investigate war crimes committed during the last Gaza conflict. We acknowledge the difficulties the Commission has faced, but we hope that it will not affect the impartiality or the thoroughness of the report and that it will be a first step towards the realization of justice for the many victims of the Gaza conflict. We remain committed to a just, lasting and peaceful solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and we support international efforts aimed at the establishment of a viable Palestinian State.

With regard to Syria, my delegation is deeply disappointed that the Syrian conflict has been raging for more than four years, with devastating humanitarian consequences and with no prospect of abating. It is one of the worst humanitarian disasters facing humankind, with severe political and economic consequences for the entire region. The only hope for the Syrian people lies in the willingness of all the parties to the conflict to immediately put an end to the violence and to start engaging each other constructively and without preconditions, with the aim of reaching an agreement on a political transition in the spirit of reconciliation, based on the Geneva communiqué of June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex). South Africa supports the ongoing diplomatic efforts of the Special Envoy, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

In conclusion, South Africa also deplores the repulsive atrocities and human rights violations committed against minorities by extremists in the region. It is important for the international community to work together to counter that threat and prevent it further spread.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): The Pakistan delegation thanks the Foreign Minister of Jordan for presiding over this meeting earlier. We also thank the Secretary-General for his perceptive briefing to the Council.

The Middle East is the cradle of human civilization. Today, sadly, it appears to have become the cradle of chaos — riven by conflict and regional rivalry, afflicted by terrorism and extremism and enduring massive human suffering. Unless this chaos, within and across

borders, is contained and controlled, it will endanger global peace, security and prosperity.

Each of the several conflicts in the Middle East needs to be addressed simultaneously — if separately, with long-term vision rather than short-term or partisan perspectives. The proximate causes of each conflict are different, yet there are some common threads: the failure of Governments and governance to meet the legitimate aspirations of the peoples concerned, unresolved issues and the consequences of outside interventions, as well as acts of omission by the international community.

In many ways — political, historic and emotional — Palestine and the plight of its people remain the root cause of the conflict and chaos that now rages across the Middle East. Sadly, today the prospect of a just solution to that perennial problem is further away than at any other time. The recent pronouncements by Israel have appalled even its closest friends. Even if words can be retracted, the continued spread of illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian lands, the blockade of Gaza, the provocations around the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque and the continued imprisonment of Palestinians pose ever-growing obstacles to a two-State solution. Such actions are effectively foreclosing the prospect of an independent, contiguous and viable Palestinian State on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Security Council bears the responsibility to act with vigour and unanimity to enforce its resolutions demanding a just and durable settlement. The Council should adopt a draft resolution establishing the parameters of the Palestinian State, set a timeline for ending the occupation and launch a new peace process to take negotiations forward.

Wittingly or otherwise, the long conflict in and around Iraq has exacerbated ethnic and sectarian fault lines and given new life to Al-Qaida and birth to an even more abhorrent terrorist entity, namely, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) — or Daesh — which now rampages across Iraq and Syria and is gaining adherents beyond, in Libya and elsewhere. In the cases of Libya and Syria, the road to hell has been paved with good intentions. The tragic outcomes are self-evident. The Arab Spring has turned into a cold and forbidding winter.

In Libya, tribal and regional rivalries have combined with extremist militants, including ISIS affiliates, to generate conditions of chaos. The Security

Council must ensure action by those in a position to contribute to restoring peace and order in Libya.

In Syria, a Hobbesian war of all against all rages, with cruelty and human suffering of a magnitude that calls into question the very humanity of the perpetrators. The situation in the Palestinian refugee camp in Yarmouk defies description. ISIS must be defeated. But for peace and order to be restored, a political solution will need to be negotiated between those willing to make mutual accommodations. The Geneva process, United Nations mediation, the Russian initiative and all other avenues should be utilized to evolve a political solution to that difficult conflict. The first priority should be to end the massive human suffering of the Syrian people.

In Yemen, the parameters of international legitimacy are much clearer. A rebel group, with the aid of dissident leaders, has occupied large parts of the country and forced out the legitimate Government, including the country's President. That situation, created by illegal force, cannot be allowed to stand, much less be accepted as the basis for negotiating a settlement of the crisis.

Pakistan welcomed the adoption of resolution 2216 (2015) and called for its full and effective implementation. We believe that the restoration of the Government of President Hadi will be an important step towards establishing peace in Yemen. The Council has called on the rebels to cease hostilities and vacate the areas they have occupied. That ought to be ensured. That said, there is an urgent need for finding a peaceful negotiated solution to the crisis through dialogue.

Several of the conflicts that have erupted across the Middle East reflect the exacerbation of fault lines within the Muslim countries concerned. The Islamic world must not allow those fissures to tear apart the divinely prescribed unity of the Ummah — the community of all Muslims. Pakistan stands ready to do all it can to promote peace and reconciliation within the world of Islam.

Finally, Pakistan's unwavering solidarity with the people of Palestine is manifested by its support over the decades. We urge the Council to act and take the lead on that issue. The resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict will also help address the new conflicts that engulf the Middle East. Urgency is essential.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union.

Mr. Mayr-Harting: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union position on the Middle East peace process has been clear, consistent and unequivocal for many years and will remain so. The only realistic way to solve the conflict is through an agreement between the parties that ends the occupation that began in 1967, that ends all claims and that fulfils the aspirations of both sides. A lasting solution to the conflict must be achieved that would see the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition. The present regional context makes the urgency of such a solution even more pressing.

Let me point out that, in the interests of time, I shall deliver a shortened version of my statement. I draw the attention of delegations to the full text, which will be circulated.

The preservation of the viability of the two-State solution must remain a priority. We are concerned about developments on the ground that could make the prospect of a two-State solution increasingly unattainable. Israel should halt all new settlements in the West Bank. We continue to urge the parties to renew their commitment to the two-State solution, to build trust and to resume meaningful negotiations with the aim of achieving a comprehensive peace agreement. The European Union also reiterates its call upon the Palestinian leadership to use constructively its United Nations status and not to undertake steps that could lead further away from a negotiated solution.

The international community must assume its responsibility in facilitating such a resumption of negotiations. The Quartet must redouble its efforts to facilitate a renewed peace process and, in doing so, reach out to all stakeholders, in particular in the region. In that context, it must be recalled that the Arab Peace Initiative — the continued validity of which was confirmed recently by Arab leaders — remains of strategic importance for any future comprehensive peace agreement.

The Security Council has the primary responsibility for maintaining peace and security, including with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We therefore fully support continued efforts within the Council to find common ground on a draft resolution that would convey an authoritative message to the parties about the framework within which to reach an agreement. We believe that the EU position on final status parameters, as set out in Council conclusions, can provide a basis for rapidly steering such efforts towards consensus.

The European Union remains deeply concerned about the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. Basic infrastructure and services must be restored. Pledges made by members of the international community towards the reconstruction of Gaza need to be honoured as a matter of urgency. We continue to call for a fundamental change of the political, security and economic situation in the Gaza Strip, including the end of the closure. The parties must urgently make progress towards a durable ceasefire, based on their agreement in Cairo on 26 August, and reach an agreement that both ends the Gaza closure and addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns. The Palestinian factions should put aside their rivalries in favour of a real national reconciliation, restoring Governmental control by the Palestinian Authority in the Gaza Strip, starting with a re-opening of the crossing points and civil service reform.

The European Union offers its full support to the Secretary-General's newly appointed Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process, Mr. Nikolay Mladenov. Last week, the Council of the European Union appointed Mr. Fernando Gentilini as EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process. We reiterate our substantial offer to Israelis and Palestinians of a special privileged partnership with the European Union in the event of peace. The EU remains determined to follow very closely developments on the ground and their broader implications, and remains ready to take further action to preserve the two-State solution. Together, the parties, the neighbouring countries and the wider international community must do all they can to engage finally and decisively on the path of a comprehensive solution to the entire Israeli-Arab conflict. For its part, the European Union is firmly intent on being present and engaged at all stages of such a process.

The European Union remains committed to achieving lasting peace, stability and security in Syria,

Iraq and the wider region, as well as to countering the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). To that end, on 16 March, we adopted conclusions on a detailed regional strategy focusing on these priorities. We reiterate that a lasting solution urgently requires a Syrian-led inclusive political process, and we fully support Special Envoy de Mistura's intention to push for consultations with all the relevant domestic and international actors, with a focus on the contents of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). There is an urgent need to revive the political process and advance the prospects for achieving a political transition, based on the Geneva communiqué and in line with relevant Security Council resolutions.

We deplore the ongoing violations and abuses of international humanitarian and human rights law. Perpetrators of such abuses need to be held to account. Justice and accountability should therefore be included in the political process from the outset. We call on all Syrian parties to show clear and concrete commitment to such a political process, and we urge those with influence on the parties — and notably on the Al-Assad regime — to put pressure on them to end all violence and to engage constructively in the process. We also call on all parties to respect their international obligations to ensure the protection of civilians. The European Union strongly condemns the escalation of violence by the Al-Assad regime, whose brutal war against its own people, massive human rights violations and systematic obstruction of democratic reforms have heavily contributed to the flourishing of ISIL in Syria.

The conditions in the Palestinian refugee camp in Yarmouk have become critical and need to be addressed with the utmost urgency. The ongoing denial of humanitarian access to the refugees living in Yarmouk by the Syrian regime and other belligerents is unacceptable. All sides should cease their hostilities in order to ensure immediate and unconditional humanitarian access to those in need and provide safe passage for all civilians who wish to leave the camp, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

As the European Union, we commend the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for the important work it is doing. We will continue to work together with its Commissioner-General, Pierre Krähenbühl, and all other partners to help alleviate the suffering of people in the greatest need.

We also note with serious concern that humanitarian needs continue to increase, while access is being hampered by an increasing number of constraints. The European Union condemns the Al-Assad regime's continued intransigence on humanitarian access. We reiterate our call on all parties, in particular the Al-Assad regime, to comply with and immediately implement in full the provisions of the relevant resolutions. We will seek to accelerate the implementation of those resolutions to deliver cross-border and cross-line assistance in order to help those most desperately in need.

Finally, the European Union is deeply concerned about the allegations of the use of toxic chemicals in barrel bomb attacks in the Idlib governorate between 16 and 31 March. If these alleged chlorine attacks are substantiated, they would violate the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolutions 2118 (2013) and 2209 (2015), which envisage further measures under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations in case of non-compliance. The international community must ensure that impunity does not prevail.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico.

Mr. Alday González (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Jordan for convening and participating in today's open debate. A look at recent events in the Middle East serves to highlight the vital importance that Mexico gives diplomacy and dialogue as key tools for crafting long-term political solutions to conflicts that affect the region.

The continuing humanitarian crisis in Syria, the deplorable violence against civilians by extremist groups in several countries in the Middle East, the accelerating deterioration of the situation in Yemen and the stagnation of the peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians are a selective sample of the challenges the international community as a whole is facing in its attempts to achieve security, stability and higher levels of development in the region. The loss of innocent lives in each of those crises and the violations of international law can no longer be the common denominator of a region that has contributed so much to modern civilization.

Since the suspension of the latest round of peace talks between Palestine and Israel a year ago, we see a process of political decay between the parties and a worsening humanitarian situation for millions of

Palestinians. The reconstruction and development of the Gaza Strip depends not only on a political process that reflects the will of the parties, but also the unrestricted access of humanitarian assistance pursuant to resolution 1860 (2009). We advocate for the secure and ongoing implementation of the tripartite mechanism established to monitor the entry of people and supplies into Gaza, ensuring both attention to the basic needs of the Palestinian people and the security of Israel.

My delegation reiterates its support for a comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the recognition of the right of existence of the State of Israel and the establishment of a politically and economically viable Palestinian State and which allows for coexistence in peace and security within secure borders and internationally recognized.

Mexico believes that Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory are a violation of international law, and therefore constitute one of the main obstacles to reaching a peaceful solution to the conflict.

We expect the new Government to reaffirm Israel's commitment to the two-State solution and that it take measures to promote the atmosphere needed to restart negotiations. We are also convinced that hatred and discrimination will never lead to peace. We echo the condemnations of all forms of racism, including anti-Semitic attacks or demonstrations, wherever they occur and whatever the pretext.

The international community cannot remain a passive actor while the root causes of conflict persist. Mexico reiterates its call for the Security Council to fulfil its responsibilities under the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Its involvement, support and leadership in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process is vital. We call for the resumption of peace talks as soon as possible, and reiterate our commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict and our willingness to continue contributing to international efforts towards that goal.

We take the opportunity of this open debate to also express our profound concern over the rapid deterioration of, and escalation of the crisis in, Yemen, which has not only led to violence against civilians but also turned into a severe humanitarian crisis owing to the failure to provide people with access to their basic needs in various parts of the country. I reiterate the concern expressed by several previous speakers at

the unfortunate loss of civilian lives as a result of the violence. We call for dialogue between the parties and the active mediation of the United Nations with a view to reaching a political solution, not a military one, that can allow us to reach a firm and lasting solution to the Yemeni conflict.

Along similar lines, we are in favour of a political, peaceful negotiated solution to the Syrian conflict that guarantees respect for human rights and international humanitarian law. The gravity of the level of violence in that country and attacks against the population are unprecedented. We believe that the use of chemical weapons is not only a violation of international law, but also an unacceptable chapter in our contemporary history. Once again, we condemn the use of prohibited chemical weapons against civilians in Syria, by whomsoever and under any circumstances.

Finally, I would like to reiterate the commitment of Mexico to the efforts of the international community to counter the spread of violent extremism. Human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law committed by the so-called Islamic State are intolerable and unjustifiable.

It is important for the international community to generate comprehensive preventive measures to promote tolerance, respect for human rights, the empowerment of the least represented groups and the promotion of development opportunities for the most affected communities.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. León González (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We support the statement delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The situation in the Middle East region is a grave concern to the international community. The Palestinian people continue to fall victim to the aggression by Israel, which occupies their lands, murders their children, destroys their heritage and undermines their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination. The statements by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu against the establishment of a Palestinian State are unacceptable and deserve to be universally repudiated.

The Security Council should categorically reject such aggression and adopt, without further delay, a

draft resolution demanding that Israel immediately halt the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territory and other Arab territories. Such a draft resolution should also call on Israel to immediately lift the blockade on the Gaza Strip, as well as to halt the construction and expansion of illegal Israeli settlements and the separation wall in occupied Palestinian territories. It should also call for accountability for war crimes and collective punishments committed by Israel in the occupied territory.

The undemocratic right to exercise a veto in the Security Council, which has allowed Israel to act with impunity in the conduct of Israel, must cease. This organ must comply with its obligation to promote a negotiated solution that would bring about an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and the peaceful coexistence of two independent States on the basis of the establishment of an independent, sovereign and viable Palestine State. A just solution must also be sought to the issue of Palestinian refugees, in line with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

Cuba reiterates its fervent condemnation of the Israeli settlement campaign in the occupied Palestinian territories, including in East Jerusalem. We similarly reject all measures, policies and practices associated with this settlement campaign that also include the construction and expansion of the illegal settlements, as well as the separation wall, the destruction and/or confiscation of Palestinian land and property, the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian families and the transfer of settlers to occupied Palestinian territory, to mention just some of the violations of international law, international humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions.

We also condemn and demand an immediate halt to violence, provocations and incitement to hatred and terrorism on the part of Israeli settlers. We also call for a halt to arbitrary detentions, mass imprisonment and genocide against this people. We also call for an end to reprisals and blackmail of the Palestinian National Authority. There must be full respect for the agreements as signed between this State and the State of Israel.

Cuba reiterates its unequivocal solidarity with the Palestinian people and our firm and resolute support for all actions aimed at promoting recognition of the State of Palestine on the basis of the pre-1967 borders with its capital in East Jerusalem. We also recognize the right of the State of Palestine to become a full Member of the United Nations.

The reconstruction of the Gaza Strip following the horrific bombing campaign and massive destruction inflicted by Israel in July and August 2014, which only further exacerbated the difficult living conditions of the inhabitants given the cruel and illegal blockade, also deserves the attention and urgent support of the international community in order to bring new hope to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians suffering under the yoke of destruction and war.

Peace in Syria will be possible only by respecting the right of its people to decide its own destiny. A political solution through dialogue and negotiation is the only alternative to the conflict in Syria. Those fuelling the conflict from abroad with the stated goal of regime change are responsible for the thousands of civilian victims whose lives have been lost over four years of fighting. We reiterate our concern at seeing the loss of innocent lives as the fallout of the Syrian conflict. We once again condemn all acts of violence that have taken place in that country targeting the civilian population. However, the supposed protection of human life and combating terrorism cannot serve as a pretext for foreign intervention. Unfortunately, some States seek to dissociate the phenomenon of terrorism from the humanitarian situation in Syria in order to prolong the crisis, when the main reason for the emergence of the humanitarian crisis in Syria is the generalized terrorist phenomenon that enjoys outside support.

Cuba reiterates its condemnation of all acts, methods and practices of terrorism in all guises and forms, wherever they take place and by whomever they are perpetrated, including State-sponsored terrorism, whether they occur in the Middle East or anywhere else in the world.

The United Nations should seek an immediate ceasefire in order to pave the way to dialogue and negotiation, and should also support all efforts along this path, such as those being undertaken by the Russian Federation and other international actors. The prestige of the Organization should invariably be used to oppose those seeking to stoke the conflict by importing arms and mercenaries.

The Syrian Government has demonstrated its willingness to establish peace. We reiterate our acknowledgement of its decision to abide by the Chemical Weapons Convention and the steps it has taken to destroy its stockpiles and chemical-weapon production facilities. We urge the international community, in particular the States parties to the Convention, to

support the Syrian Government and people in fulfilling their obligations under the international legal regime.

The vast human, financial and material resources that are currently consumed by wars in the region would be better used to ensure health care and quality education; to build infrastructure projects, which generate progress; to protect and promote all human rights, including the right to development; and to eradicate poverty and promote social justice. These should be our priorities as members of an Organization that was founded 70 years ago to protect international peace and security and uphold human dignity.

The Security Council plays a crucial role in supporting the achievement of the well-being, peace and development that all the peoples of the Middle East deserve. The States members of the Council must exercise a firm, effective and clear resistance against the recourse to war and be advocates of peaceful solutions without foreign interference that safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and preserve the life of the individuals involved in or affected by conflict in the region.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Seck (*spoke in French*): The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is, first of all, pleased to have seen the Minister for Foreign and Expatriate Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan preside in person over this meeting.

Allow me, on behalf of the Committee, to condemn the attack perpetrated by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant against the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk in Damascus. Like their Syrian brothers and sisters in other communities, having seen their living conditions deteriorate and their sufferings increase, the Palestinians of Syria are now caught in violent clashes that force them to endure appalling conditions and suffer a second displacement. They certainly deserve our attention and support.

The situation in Syria highlights once again the precarious legal and humanitarian conditions in which Palestinian refugees, one of the most vulnerable communities in the region, have been living in since 1948. In that regard, I pay tribute to the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other United Nations

entities that, despite the war, remain in Syria and in other host countries to continue to provide basic assistance to the victims of the conflict.

The war last summer against the people of Gaza has left the coastal strip in a disastrous state. That is why, on 31 March and 1 April, our Committee organized a seminar at the United Nations Office in Vienna on the theme of speeding up relief, recovery and reconstruction in post-war Gaza. That event, which brought together representatives of many States, international experts, heads of United Nations agencies working in Gaza and representatives of the State of Palestine, allowed us to take stock of Gaza's pressing needs, in particular in the fields of water and energy. Although the pace of the process is far too slow, we note the implementation of the tripartite temporary Gaza reconstruction mechanism.

We underscore that, although the relief operations under way are beginning to bear fruit, reconstruction continues to be hampered by certain obstacles linked to the delivery of vital construction materials and essential humanitarian supplies. In this regard, the international community has an obligation to meet the most urgent basic needs of the people of Gaza and to allow them to seek out new means for subsistence so as to recover their full dignity and regain courage. The participants at the Vienna seminar therefore called on the international community and donors to quickly disburse the promised funds and on Israel to lift the blockade so that life in Gaza could resume and offer fresh hope to its people.

On 1 April, Palestine became a State party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, as it intends to achieve the full recognition of its sovereignty and statehood through peaceful means and legal means. The Committee notes with satisfaction that Israel has reversed its decision to withhold Palestinian tax revenues, which it will give to the Palestinian Government in accordance with its international commitments. In the same spirit, Israel should cease taking punitive measures that exacerbate the suffering and despair of thousands of Palestinian families that rely entirely on Government salaries and the benefits and funds of the international community. Furthermore, the Committee cannot ignore the ongoing settlement activities in the West Bank, the evictions of Palestinians and the confiscation of their property in occupied East Jerusalem, which are also an affront to their rights and dignity and must come to an end as soon as possible.

The Committee takes note of the recently held elections in Israel and calls on the new Israeli Government to return to the negotiating table in order to engage with its Palestinian partner and the international community to put an end to one of the most flagrant situations of injustice in the twentieth century, which deprives a whole nation of the opportunity to live in peace, freedom and security on its ancestral lands. A comprehensive, fair and lasting settlement to the Palestinian question will allow us to create favourable conditions for the advent of a new Middle East and will pave the way for cooperation that will benefit all the peoples of the region at a time when many threats loom on the horizon.

We commemorate this year's seventieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations and the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. I take this opportunity to reiterate once again that we must take action to ensure that the Council's resolutions on the question of Palestine are effectively implemented in accordance with a previously established deadline.

Finally, the Committee wishes to reaffirm its commitment to the principle of a peaceful settlement to the conflict providing for the existence of two States, and its determination that the Palestinian people shall be able to exercise its legitimate rights in a sovereign, viable and independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Costa Rica.

Mr. Mendoza-García (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): We congratulate the Jordanian delegation on its accession to the presidency of the Council this month. We also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jordan, Mr. Nasser Judeh, for his statement.

Costa Rica decided to participate in this debate because of the importance we attach to the situation in the Middle East as a peace-loving country that voluntarily disbanded its army more than 65 years ago. We firmly believe in peaceful solutions to conflicts between peoples and States in the framework of international law and multilateral diplomacy.

Turning to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we reiterate our categorical condemnation of the escalation

of violence in a conflict that has cost the lives of civilians, including women and children. We renew our call on both parties to resolve the differences that have long undermined the right of both peoples to live in peace and security. In that regard, we urge them to return to negotiations on the core issues of the conflict, on the basis of ongoing obligations and agreements previously reached between the parties, backed by international law and the decisions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, with the aim of laying the foundations for direct negotiations leading to the achievement of the objective of the international community — the peaceful coexistence of an independent Palestinian State and the State of Israel.

Costa Rica welcomes Palestine's membership as the 123rd State party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court on 1 April. As the Foreign Minister of Costa Rica, Manuel González Sanz, said at the time, for Costa Rica, a country that believes firmly in the rule of law, the role of international bodies as instruments for peaceful coexistence, is crucial. This rings particularly true in relation to treaties the goal of which is the protection of human rights, fundamental freedoms and international humanitarian law as embodied in the Rome Statute.

On the current situation in Yemen, my delegation is concerned about developments there and the escalation of the conflict. The crisis represents a threat to the security and stability of Yemen, the region at large and international peace. A ceasefire is therefore urgently needed. As the World Health Organization has reported, some 650 people have already died in the conflict and more than 2,000 have been wounded as a result of the recent escalation in the conflict. The humanitarian political situation is crucial at this time. The support of the International Committee of the Red Cross has been essential, but as its spokesperson has said, if the war continues at this rate, we will need more resources.

On 14 April, the Security Council adopted resolution 2216 (2015), which establishes an arms embargo and affirms that a solution to the crisis must be political. We must follow that path and not allow Yemen to become a theatre for other nations proxy wars. Likewise, we emphasize the call for the respect of international humanitarian law; the need for all parties to ensure the security and safety of civilians, including those receiving assistance; and the need to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian staff, including United Nations and associated personnel, in order to

prevent a recurrence of the sad events that took place yesterday in Somalia, where United Nations staff were killed in the line of duty.

Costa Rica believes that if we wish to prevent the further deterioration of the conflict in Syria, we must put an end to the armed conflict as soon as possible and seek a political solution, as agreed in the recent negotiations in Moscow, based on the terms of the Geneva communiqué issued on 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex) by the Action Group for Syria, which calls for the establishment of a transitional Government that could offer a neutral environment in which change would involve and be brought about on the basis of the mutual consent of all parties, be they members of the current Government, the opposition or other groups.

We urgently call on the Syrian authorities to respect their commitments under international law and, in particular, under international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Because the Government bears the responsibility for protecting its own population, it is urgent that the necessary measures be taken to avoid further bloodshed and human rights violations. This obligation falls mainly on the shoulders of the country's authorities, but it is also the responsibility of the armed opposition and any other country directly or indirectly involved in the conflict. We stress that the decision of how Syria organizes its Government and institutions is one that the Syrian people alone can make, through a broad and inclusive political dialogue based on respect for diversity, tolerance, peace and democracy.

In light of all this, we hope that the Security Council can fully exercise its mandate to maintain peace and international security in the Middle East, and to ensure the full exercise of international law and the rule of law in the region. We hope to return to this Chamber in the near future, not to call for negotiations and tolerance between the parties, but to celebrate agreements and an end to their conflicts, and discuss plans for a sustainable and harmonious development among peoples.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Namibia.

Mr. Emvula (Namibia): I congratulate you, Madam, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of April, and thank you for organizing this very important debate, which affords the wider United Nations membership an opportunity

to contribute to these very important deliberations on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The situation in the Middle East remains of great concern to Namibia, as the occupation of the Palestinian territories continues unabated and the people of Palestine continue to live under subjugation. This debate is taking place following the Israeli legislative elections held on 17 March on the premise of not establishing a Palestinian State. This debate is the second to be held on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, following the failure of the Security Council to adopt a draft resolution calling for Israel to withdraw from Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 within three years, and for the parties to reach a negotiated solution to the conflict within one year.

It goes without saying that the Security Council holds the key to peace in the Middle East. The situation remains fragile, with up to 80,000 families living in houses that have sustained varying degrees of damage. Tens of thousands of children continue to live with injuries and psychological trauma, and tens of thousands of people continue to live in overcrowded temporary shelters with inadequate sanitation facilities. At the same time, Israel, the occupying Power, increases its demolition of Palestinian buildings, continues its settlement expansion and hinders reconstruction efforts in Gaza. The establishment and expansion of settlements are at the centre of many of the ongoing human rights violations, and such persistent settlement activities could kill the prospects for peace. Namibia calls on Israel, the occupying Power, to end its punitive demolition of Palestinian homes in response to alleged acts of violence by Palestinians in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

The Palestinian people and their leadership continue to face an unrelenting barrage of repressive, illegal and destructive measures from Israel, the occupying Power. In addition to its ongoing colonization of the State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, gross human-rights violations, seizure and destruction of homes and properties, arrest and detention of thousands of civilians and the inhumane blockade imposed on more than 1.8 million people in the Gaza Strip, Israel, the occupying Power, has also resumed stealing Palestinian tax revenues — which currently is at least under review

and may enable legitimate, peaceful steps to be taken by the Palestinian leadership in their ongoing pursuit of justice and for the purpose of protecting the Palestinian people and advancing the realization of their rights, including the right to self-determination and freedom.

Namibia is further concerned about the fact that Israel, the occupying Power, continues to maintain that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights does not apply to the occupied territories, as well as about the need for accountability for alleged human-rights violations committed during Israel's military operations in Gaza, the excessive use of force by Israel's security forces and the violence perpetrated by Israeli settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. We are also concerned that Israel, the occupying Power, continues to deny entry to the West Bank and Gaza to the Independent Commission of Inquiry appointed by the Human Rights Council in July and charged with investigating violations of international humanitarian and human-rights law arising from Israeli military operations carried out in the occupied Palestinian territories beginning in June 2014. Namibia would like to remind the Security Council of its responsibility to stop Israel's continued settlement expansion in the West Bank, which undermines the prospects for attaining a peace agreement, and to ensure that investigations into war crimes committed during the Gaza onslaught are impartial and those found accountable are prosecuted.

Namibia wishes to reaffirm its call for Israel's complete and unconditional withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and calls on the international community to facilitate the creation of a Palestinian State on the basis of the 1967 borders. We strongly condemn all acts of violence and are concerned about the increased tensions, which have affected both Israelis and Palestinians. Namibia urges both sides to take immediate steps to restore calm and encourages both Israeli and Palestinian leaders and their citizens to work together to lower tensions, reject violence, avoid all provocation and seek a path to peace. In that regard, Namibia calls negotiations to be resumed as soon as possible and for donor funding, so as to accelerate the reconstruction of Gaza, address the basic needs of the Palestinian population and ensure stability.

Namibia will continue to support the people of Palestine, who, despite suffering for so long and continuing to bear this burden, have remained

steadfast and fully committed to achieving their inalienable rights, justice and their legitimate national aspirations, including self-determination, freedom and independence, and to the pursuit of political, diplomatic, peaceful and non-violent means for attaining those objectives, for which there is overwhelming and long-standing international support. Namibia remains convinced that our deliberations here can be fruitful and contribute to the search for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution that will end the 1967 Israeli occupation and enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights in an independent State of Palestine, with Jerusalem as its capital.

I would like to conclude by reiterating Namibia's unwavering support for and solidarity with the people of Palestine in their just cause of freedom, independence and social justice, and our steadfast backing for Palestine's full membership in the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Hilale (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Madam President, for presiding over this important meeting, which is even more important to us as a member of the League of Arab States and adherent of Islam. It comes at a significant juncture for the situation in the Middle East, which we can only describe as extremely unfortunate. Indeed, all we have seen is the absence of any political solution to this major conflict, along with the expansion of terrorism's challenge to peace and security.

The negotiations relaunched in June 2013, through the efforts of the United States and its Secretary of State, John Kerry — who worked hard to convince the Palestinian and Israeli parties to return to the negotiating table to discuss a two-State solution — were, however, doomed to failure thanks to Israel's aggression in Gaza, which resulted in the death of more than 2,000 Palestinians, including women, children and the elderly, and in which numerous buildings were destroyed and many people left homeless. In that regard, we would like to pay tribute to the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in supporting the victims of the aggression, and in view of the deterioration of the humanitarian situation for Palestinian refugees both inside and outside Palestine, we would like to call on the international community to help UNRWA in order

to assist it in providing basic services in these difficult circumstances and to bridge its financing gaps.

His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco has reiterated in various international forums that we must end the spread of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories and that we should encourage all key players, including the Pope, to help in that regard. We would also like to inform the Council that Morocco chaired a meeting in Marrakesh in January 2014, focusing on the issue of Jerusalem and calling for a political solution. In November of last year in Rabat, we hosted the focal points of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation with the goal of conveying a message to the international community on the importance of defending the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem. That is because respect for the rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to the establishment of an independent State, is the only way to reach a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

On 6 April, Morocco, as a member of the Arab League, took part in the Arab Summit held in Sharm el-Sheikh. The Summit was aimed in part at mobilizing support for the Palestinian cause and putting an end to the Israeli aggression within the framework of an independent Palestinian State established on the borders of 4 June 1967 and a final settlement based on the Arab Peace Initiative. The only way to resolve the Palestinian question is through the return of the two parties to the negotiating table. They must work towards a just settlement of the conflict based on the two-State solution and international legitimacy as well as the agreed terms of reference, with two States coexisting peacefully side by side. This is the only formula aimed at putting an end to this aggression that enjoys international agreement. It is therefore high time that the international community put an end to this situation so as to promote cooperation and bring prosperity to the region as a whole.

The situation in Libya is dire, especially given the rise of terrorist groups there. I should like also to note that 21 Egyptians and 28 Ethiopians were beheaded by Daesh terrorists. Given the number of terrorist groups in Africa, including Boko Haram, Daesh and others, we would like to see stronger international efforts made to uproot terrorism in the region.

We in Morocco are deeply concerned by the situation in Libya, because the Maghreb is very important to us. We have a common destiny with Libya as well as with other members of the Arab Maghreb Union. We also stress the importance of honouring the commitments

made in the Marrakech treaty aimed at bringing about peace and security in the region. We are committed to helping our brothers in Libya to overcome their ordeal and to establish national unity within the framework of territorial integrity.

Therefore, based on the request made by the United Nations last February, His Majesty King Mohammed agreed to host a meeting of all Libyan factions in Morocco, under the supervision of Mr. Bernardino Leon, in order to support the efforts made by the United Nations and based on our belief that a peaceful political process is the only solution to the Libyan crisis. Morocco is honouring its commitments with respect to all factions in Libya, and our main concern is to find a solution and look to the future.

The dialogue held today and last week brought about progress that we warmly welcome. We did not expect that all Libyan factions would come together under one umbrella in Morocco in order to establish a Government of national unity, and we hope that the meeting of Libyan factions to be held in Libya, under the supervision of the international envoy, will be successful.

Let me stress that the Kingdom of Morocco will make every effort to promote success in all undertakings regarding Libya. We are working hard in order to ensure respect for the rule of law in Libya in a way that preserves its territorial integrity.

We express our concern at the deterioration of the situation in Yemen, with the ongoing violations of legitimacy as represented by President Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi Mansour, in violation of resolution 2201 (2015) and other relevant resolutions. Morocco welcomes resolution 2216 (2015), which calls on all parties to put an end to the attacks in Yemen and on the Houthis to implement the resolution and allow humanitarian access. We also reiterate our call to preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yemen.

The Syrian crisis is now in its fourth year, with no solution in sight. In fact, the situation is deteriorating by the day, and, as a result, the Syrian people are suffering a great deal. We in Morocco are taking a dual approach: supporting all the parties on the one hand, and trying to help the Syrian refugees on the other. This is being done through the hospital that was established in 2012 in the Zaatari refugee camp and provides medical services to thousands of Syrians.

Morocco also took part in the international conference for the reconstruction of Syria held on 31 March. We will make every effort to provide support to our brothers in Syria and to help find a solution to the Syrian crisis. My delegation deems it very important to preserve the territorial integrity of Syria and to support Mr. Staffan de Mistura.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Momen (Bangladesh): I would like to convey my deep appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Nasser Judeh, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jordan, and to you, Mrs. Dina Kavar, for having organized this debate on the situation in Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

The Palestinian issue is a long-standing issue in the field of international peace and security, and its resolution deserves top priority. All will agree with me that the people of Palestine cannot live with this uncertainty of life and livelihood forever.

We regret that the appalling human rights and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the repeated appeals of the international community to improve the deteriorating conditions of the Palestinian people remain unheeded. The people in the occupied territories continue to suffer due to Israel's blockades, closures, confiscation of land and demolition of houses. The illegal separation walls continue to divide and isolate communities, destroying livelihoods and preventing people from accessing their jobs, families, markets, schools and hospitals. Let us tear down these walls once and for all.

The Gaza borders have been subject to a regime of closure that is without precedent anywhere. This closure is tantamount to the strangulation of an entire population in the form of collective punishment. The quality of life of the Palestinians had already diminished to subsistence levels; these systematic efforts at strangulation erupt in periodic escalations of violence and lead to further despair and destitution. Should we believe that Israel is doing so purposefully to generate fear, fury and distress among the Palestinians? We deplore these policies of collective punishment — policies of forcing Palestinian people off their land; detaining people for a long time without charge; restricting freedom of speech, freedom of movement and freedom of property ownership by Palestinians; deporting Palestinian inhabitants; and

depriving people of their legitimate claim to natural resources, including scarce water resources.

The Government of Israel has continued its settlement campaign in the occupied Palestinian territory, with a particularly aggressive settlement expansion in East Jerusalem. Those measures have been soundly rejected by the international community and confirmed as illegal, but they continue unabated. All settlement construction, including so-called natural growth, is illegal under international law and must be halted immediately. Settlement activities constitute grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention and war crimes under article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). We appreciate the decision of the Palestinian Authority to become a State party to the International Criminal Court in order to seek justice for the people of Palestine.

We are pleased that the Israeli Government has finally announced the release of three months' worth of the tax revenue it collects from Palestinians on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. However, the practice of withholding tax revenue is a punitive measure used to undermine the Palestinian Authority; therefore, that practice must forever be stopped. We urge Israel, as the occupying Power, to fulfil its legal obligation to ensure that all inhabitants are safeguarded against all acts of violence or threats; to cease the illegal detention of Palestinian people, including children; to stop the destruction of homes and land confiscation; to allow the Palestinian people access to their lands, employment and natural resources; to desist from transferring its own population to the territories it has occupied; to lift its embargo against Palestinians; to immediately open all border crossings, allowing the free movement of goods, persons and humanitarian aid; and to withdraw all Israeli settlers from the occupied land of Palestine.

We express our total solidarity with the Palestinian people and reiterate our full and unwavering support for the legitimate and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to a sovereign and independent State. At this juncture, we demand an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967, and look forward to a two-State solution wherein the sovereign and independent Palestinian and Israeli States live side by side, in harmony and peace, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders. We also demand just resolution of all final status issues and the mobilization of international support for assistance to the Palestinian people without delay.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank Mr. Nasser Judeh, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriate Affairs, for presiding over this morning's meeting, thereby reaffirming Jordan's deep involvement in the question of Palestine and other matters related to the Middle East. I would like to thank the delegation of Jordan for the efforts it has made during their presidency of the Council. I also thank the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing this morning, and take this opportunity to welcome the appointment of Mr. Nickolay Mladenov as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. I would also like to express our appreciation for his predecessor, Mr. Robert Serry, for his efforts during his term.

Events in the Middle East continue to change even as they pick up momentum. However, what has not changed is the fact that there is still no solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict. In the absence of such a solution, there is international broad-based support for the two-State solution, the enjoyment by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, the establishment of the State of Palestine based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and an end to Israel's occupation of all occupied Arab lands. There is also recognition of the need to end settlement activity and to dismantle existing Israeli settlements in the occupied lands, which are illegal. It is further necessary to put an end to the unjust blockade of Gaza and to work on the reconstruction of Gaza so that all residents can live in dignity. These are all givens, and have been reflected in many General Assembly resolutions.

There has also been a significant amount of recognition of the State of Palestine. We refer in particular to Palestine's joining the International Criminal Court, and the recent Summit of the League of Arab States in Sharm el-Sheikh, which affirmed the Arab Peace Initiative and all its terms of reference. However, it is unfortunate that Israel continues to take action undermine those givens, as reflected in many statements issued by Israeli officials. Today, we appeal to Israel to shoulder its responsibility, take steps to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and achieve peace in the region on the basis of the two-State solution, adopt a resolution to end Israel's occupation of the Arab and Palestinian lands since 1967 within a specified time frame. We also call for the identification of

mechanisms that would make such a resolution binding on the occupying Power. We call on the international community to support the building of Palestinian institutions and to assist the Palestinian Authority and the Government of National Consensus, including through efforts to rebuild Government institutions and the civil service in the Gaza Strip. This would help the Palestinian people and enhance national unity.

In March, we commemorated the fifth anniversary of the Syrian crisis. Where does the international community stand vis-à-vis that crisis, which has claimed the lives of 250,000 Syrians, led to the displacement of half the Syrian population and threatened international peace and security? The Syrian people took to the streets in peaceful demonstrations to demand their basic rights. They were unarmed and defenceless, yet they were met with brutal killing and even aerial bombardment. That has led to the current situation in Syria, which threatens that country's future and has led to the spread of terrorism and extremism.

Most Syrians have been affected by the crisis; however, the greatest impact has been on those living in areas besieged by the regime and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and in remote areas. They face death by starvation and the deprivation of medical aid, in addition to explosive barrels. I refer to the report of the Syrian American Medical Society Foundation, entitled "Slow Death: Life and Death in Syrian Communities under Siege", which not only documents the tragedy of besieged areas, but the true scope of the tragedy, which goes beyond the current estimates.

With regard to the situation in the Yarmouk refugee camp, in his recent report (S/2015/264) the Secretary-General indicates that the humanitarian situation there has greatly deteriorated, with camp residents now facing the injustice of ISIL and the regime. There must be an end to the suffering of the residents of the Yarmouk camp, and the Security Council needs to use the available tools under the Charter of the United Nations to guarantee the implementation of its own relevant resolutions. Continued silence vis-à-vis the crimes of preventing the delivery of food and medical aid allows the perpetrators of such crimes to feel that they enjoy impunity. It also gives the green light for more crimes.

There are more than 4 million Syrian refugees, half of whom are children. About 2 million Syrian children are not in schools, resulting in a lost generation. If those children are unable to enjoy their right to education,

they will be used and recruited by extremist groups. In that context, the State of Qatar, during the third International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria, hosted by Kuwait last month, launched a fund for education and vocational development for Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons that aims to combat extremist ideology. I commend Syria's neighbouring countries for taking in such huge numbers of refugees.

Given the adoption of resolution 2209 (2015) on the use of chemicals and toxic material, it is exasperating that such materials continue to be used. We call on the Council to guarantee legal prosecution of those who perpetrate those crimes and hold them accountable.

In conclusion, Qatar firmly believes that the solution to the Syrian crisis should be based on a political transition built on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), and that precludes any party that has been involved in the bloodshed in Syria. Such a solution should meet the aspirations of the Syrian people, provide for accountability for the crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Syria and guarantee the country's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity, as we have continued to call for over the past few years.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Çevik (Turkey): At the outset, we would like to express our appreciation to the Jordanian presidency for organizing this important meeting.

The Middle East is experiencing a process of drastic change. The consequences, which range from terrorism to devastation and displacement, are affecting the entire region and beyond.

The Palestinian question lies at the heart of the challenges in the region and continues to undermine the prospects for lasting regional and global peace. The devastating effects of last year's destruction in Gaza persist. We continue to channel humanitarian aid, including fuel, flour and medicine, to those in need. The total value of our official humanitarian assistance to Gaza since July 2014 has exceeded \$19 million. However, only long-term solutions can change the tide in Gaza's reconstruction. The continuous illegal blockade and other restrictions in the ability of the people in Gaza to sustain their daily lives undermine international efforts for reconstruction and must be lifted in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009).

Further steps should be taken to alleviate the dire situations, sustain the current ceasefire and support the efforts of the Palestinian National Unity Government to operate in Gaza.

The need to find a negotiated political settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, achieving a two-State solution and ending the longest occupation in modern history, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, remain urgent priorities. The continuation of the status quo is not an option. The historical injustice against the Palestinian people, reinforced by the further expansion of illegal settlements, forced displacements, house demolitions, the excessive use of force against civilians, military raids and incursions and attempts to change the historical status of Haram Al-Sharif, is fuelling hatred, alienation and radicalism in the region and beyond.

Palestinian unity is crucial to reaching a lasting solution. In that regard, we should all support the Palestinian National Unity Government. But first and foremost, the Israeli side should prove its sincerity about its commitment to a two-State solution. It is high time for the international community to renew its engagement in the solution of the problem. The Palestinians should not be deprived any longer of their basic right to live in an independent State. We need to intensify our efforts towards the adoption of a Security Council draft resolution that sets a time frame and parameters for peace negotiations, based on the two-State peace vision. The Council should not miss another opportunity to fulfil its primary responsibility vis-à-vis international peace and security. Turkey will continue its support to finding a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict and to the establishment of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State within the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The recent developments in the region demonstrate how multiple crises are interlinked, and therefore need to be addressed with a broader perspective, but based on the same fundamental principles. The Syrian crisis, which has provided fertile ground for the rise of terrorist groups such as Daesh and caused the deepening of sectarian fault lines in the region, has become a source of distress for the Palestinians as well. The humanitarian disaster, currently reaching its climax in the Yarmouk refugee camp, has added a new aspect to the ongoing Syrian tragedy. The suffering of the Palestinian refugees, who had been living under the brutal siege of the regime for years, was exacerbated

by Daesh barbarism, which is in fact a result of the real problem.

The situation in Syria has gone from bad to worse. Syrians from all backgrounds are together waging a struggle for survival and for their future. Turkey is gravely concerned by the humanitarian and security impact of the crisis and its unprecedented devastation. Turkey has now become the biggest refugee-hosting country in the world. In the light of the enormity of that challenge, I must reiterate that meaningful and genuine burden-sharing is the collective responsibility of the international community. The international community still lacks a comprehensive strategy with political, security and humanitarian pillars to re-establish stability in Syria.

We must focus on addressing the root causes of the problem through resolute action. The regime's indiscriminate attacks should not be overshadowed by the appalling actions of Daesh. It is also important to highlight the use of barrel bombs and the increase of chlorine gas attacks by the regime's forces. The Security Council should remain seized of the matter. A genuine political transition based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), through the establishment of a transitional governing body with the authority to exercise full executive powers, remains the only solution in Syria. We cannot afford to lose further time in soul-searching.

While we will continue to support any endeavour to stop the bloodshed in Syria, we would also like to highlight our support to the Iraqi Government in its fights against Daesh and to express our concern about the rise of sectarian-motivated attacks against civilians. In that regard, the implementation of inclusive politics to end the alienation of some segments of society and the enhancements of efforts for national reconciliation should be key for Iraq's stability.

Last but not least, we are worried by the latest events in Yemen. The worsening situation may create serious regional consequences, and is a recent illustration of the damage inflicted by sectarian policies in the region. From the outset, Turkey has supported the political transition process that began with the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative in 2011 and its Implementation Mechanisms, as well as the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference and the Peace and National Partnership Agreement, signed by all parties in Yemen on 21 September 2014. However, a failure to implement the agreement and unilateral actions derailed

the transition process and reversed its achievements. We welcome resolution 2216 (2015), which is a clear and firm warning to the spoilers. We hope that the resolution will contribute to laying the groundwork for a meaningful, comprehensive dialogue that leads to a political solution. The only way to contain, if not end, the turmoil in the Middle East is a collective effort and ownership by regional actors to engage in dialogue. Yemen and Libya are no exceptions to that.

In conclusion, let me reiterate Turkey's strong commitment to the peace and security of the overall region and our full and continued solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Pedersen (Norway): I will not read out my full statement, but my delegation will circulate it.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains unresolved, and recent developments give little cause for optimism. Even so, our goal remains a two-State solution. There is simply no other option and no time to waste. The past year showed how destabilizing a lack of political progress could be. The political process towards a negotiated end to the conflict must be resumed.

Israel is forming a new Government. Norway appeals to the new Government to make clear in words and deeds its commitments to a two-State solution. History has shown that negotiations are impossible while a settlement-building programme on occupied land is ongoing. The settlements are illegal.

Norway appeals to the Palestinian leadership to form a unified and coherent Administration that upholds the policy agreed with Israel under the Oslo Accords to negotiate peacefully, reject violence and respect Israel's right to exist.

The international community should stand ready to assist the Israelis and the Palestinians within the framework of an adjusted peace architecture. Stakeholders in the region and beyond must unite in supporting the process, which must build on previous Security Council decisions, the agreements the parties have entered into and, indeed, the Arab Peace Initiative. Norway encourages the Security Council to assume responsibility and to provide constructive assistance in the process.

The role of the Ad-hoc Liaison Committee is to underpin political efforts to achieve a two-State

solution by supporting the development of sustainable institutions in preparation for Palestinian statehood. Since the last Committee meeting in New York, held on September 2014, the financial situation of the Palestinian Authority (PA) has deteriorated further. That critical situation requires that the parties and the donors redouble their efforts. It is simply not an option to let the Palestinian institutions wither. The Committee's next meeting, scheduled for 27 May in Brussels, in preparation for a ministerial meeting of the Committee in New York in September, will address the fragile financial situation of the Palestinian Authority and take stock of the efforts to rebuild Gaza. The following topics are still to be reviewed and examined by the Committee: securing and maximizing the domestic revenues of the PA, supporting institutional reforms related to good governance and the efficiency of public services, and providing incentives and facilitating trade and private sector growth.

Another crucial issue, of course, is Gaza. We cannot leave Gaza in its current condition in the aftermath of the war — isolated from the world and abandoned. The Gaza Strip is an integral part of the territory occupied in 1967 and is part of a future State of Palestine. Israel and the donors have a shared responsibility, along with the Palestinian Authority, to transfer Gaza. Progress has been far too slow. Although the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism has become more effective and more donors have been honouring their pledges, it is now urgent to start the implementation of a larger reconstruction project. Regional and internal rivalry must be set aside to facilitate the reintegration of Gaza into a single legitimate governing authority for Palestine.

It is time to call for an end to the violence in the region. By now it must be clear to everyone that there can be no military solutions to the many conflicts — not in Syria, not in Libya, not in Yemen. The regional and international parties concerned must intensify their efforts to find a political solution to the armed conflict in Syria. Norway supports all efforts to that end, particularly the activities of United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura. Norway also calls for full and safe access for humanitarian actors to all Syrian people in need.

In Iraq, we have seen important progress in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Nevertheless, there is a long way to go before Iraqi Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds feel they are part of a joint project to create a genuinely inclusive Iraq. We

encourage the Iraqi Government to step up reconciliation efforts and to give all of Iraq's constituent communities a real stake in the future of the State.

The threat posed by ISIL, or Daesh, provides an opportunity to seek resolution of the underlying conflicts that have allowed jihadist extremists to become a threat to everyone in the region and beyond. A clear non-sectarian message should be sent to and from all the regional capitals to counter the forces fuelling sectarian fears and impulses both within and between States across the region. One side alone cannot bridge the gulf of mutual distrust.

To conclude, Norway welcomes the historic framework agreement reached in Lausanne on 2 April between Iran and the P5+1, which represents an opportunity to resolve more than the nuclear issue alone. That comprehensive agreement, yet to be finalized, should set the region on a path towards cooperative security for all.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Mukerji (India): I would like to express my appreciation to the President for convening this quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing. We take this opportunity to extend our support to the newly appointed Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nikolay Mladenov, in his efforts, as well as to express our appreciation for the work of the outgoing Special Coordinator, Mr. Robert Serry.

In his briefing to the Council last month (see S/PV.7417), Mr. Serry said,

"It remains the primary responsibility of the Council to play its role in developing a new peace architecture for resolving the conflict at long last." (S/PV.7417, p. 5)

In pointing out that resolution 242 (1968), which embodies the key principle of land for peace, was nearly a half-century old, he rightly wondered whether the time had not come for the Security Council to lead.

The question of Palestine is one of the long-standing issues before the Council and the international community. While we reiterate our support to the amicable resolution of the issue, we are concerned that the Security Council has not been able to achieve the objective of a peaceful solution. At best, the Council has

been a bystander and witness to the cycles of escalation and relative calm that have come to characterize this unresolved issue. The Council's effectiveness has consequently been brought into question. We therefore join others in urging the Council to step up its efforts and take the lead in resolving this problem.

India's deep association with, and continuing commitment to, Palestine is rooted in our own modern history, which goes back to our own struggle for independence. India's position on the issue of Palestine is very clear. India reaffirms its support for the cause of Palestine and its solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united State within secure and internationally recognized borders, living side-by-side at peace with Israel, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Apart from political support to the Palestinian cause, India continues to promote Palestinian development and nation-building efforts by consistently offering technical and financial assistance. It also contributes \$1 million annually to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. India has pledged \$4 million in response to the Palestinian National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza. Within the framework of the India, Brazil and South Africa Trust Fund, with our partners Brazil and South Africa, we are also implementing development projects in Palestine and have pledged \$1 million for a new project to rebuild the Atta Habib medical centre in Gaza.

India remains firmly convinced that dialogue remains the only viable option for effectively addressing the issue. We are particularly worried that last year saw a downward tendency in the peace process. Efforts for serious negotiations between the parties were inconclusive. In addition, we faced the resumption of the tragic, escalated conflict in Gaza. Subsequent developments included unilateral actions by the parties, which unfortunately moved them further apart. There is a critical imperative for restraint in order to avoid provocation and unilateral actions, and for a return to the peace process. Diplomacy and statesmanship must prevail over hatred and violence. There is no other road to a lasting peace. We remain hopeful and urge both sides to resume the peace process soon for a comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian issue.

We express our deep concern about the activities of proscribed militias and radicalized and extremist groups in the Middle East, especially in the northern

parts of Iraq and Syria, where such forces are critically impacting regional peace and stability. The violence perpetrated against civilians, in particular against women and children, on the basis of religion and ethnicity, along with sectarianism, strikes at our common humanity. Efforts must be made by all parties and stakeholders in the region to curb those dangerous trends. We believe that the consolidation of political processes and solutions and the establishment of durable State institutions will be the most effective way to address extremism and radicalism in the region.

We note that a proscribed terrorist group has twice targeted United Nations peacekeepers from the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force. We also regret the death of a United Nations peacekeeper from the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. Security Council resolutions that proscribe terrorist groups operating in that region need to be implemented. The early and effective prosecution of such groups is essential. Only such action, endorsed by the Council, will deter such groups in other parts of the world from committing acts of terror.

As a nation that took proactive and effective steps by evacuating and safeguarding the lives of thousands of our citizens, as well as those of many nationals from 48 other countries, including four of the five permanent members of the Council, we urge all parties in Yemen to return to the negotiating table forthwith. As I stated earlier, dialogue remains the effective solution to resolve all problems.

On Syria, we reiterate our support for a Syria-led comprehensive political solution to the ongoing crisis, in alignment with the Geneva communiqué of 2012 (S/2012/522, annex). The humanitarian crisis arising out of the situation has to be addressed effectively. It is with this conviction in mind that we pledged and contributed \$2 million to the United Nations 2014 Syria Response Plan and pledged another \$2 million during the third International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria, recently held in Kuwait. We would like to urge all parties to demonstrate the requisite political will, exercise restraint and commit to seeking common ground in accommodating their differences.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Holy See.

Archbishop Auza: Mr. President, my delegation wishes to express its profound appreciation for the decision of Jordan's presidency this month to hold

this open debate on the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

The Holy See is deeply concerned about the total lack of progress in the negotiations between Palestine and Israel. It is difficult not to share the frustration expressed by the then United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, during his last Security Council briefing, on 27 March (see S/PV.7417). As was recognized on that occasion, Israel has genuine and legitimate concerns for its security. However, the Holy See believes that such security will come not in isolation from its neighbours, but in taking its place with them through a negotiated peace with the Palestinians through the implementation of the two-State solution, which has the support of the Holy See and of the international community in general. The Holy See joins its voice once more with all the people of peace in calling for serious and concrete negotiations that will reinvigorate the peace process.

The Holy See does not cease to encourage the leaders of Lebanon to resolve the impasse that has prevented the election of a President since May 2014 by putting aside narrow political interests for the sake of the greater good of a unified Lebanon. That institutional void makes the nation more vulnerable and fragile in the face of the overall situation in the Middle East. The international community must support Lebanon in every way to regain institutional normalcy and stability. It must also help it care for the huge number of refugees in its territory, which has created a situation that carries the danger of extremist infiltration among the hapless refugees.

The conflict in Syria, as Baroness Valerie Amos defined it in her Security Council briefing last 26 March (see S/PV.7418), has reached breathtaking levels of savagery. The indiscriminate destruction of basic infrastructure, such as water and electricity facilities, hospitals and schools, worsens the plight of civilians each passing day. The fall of Idlib, just 37 miles south-west of Aleppo, has sown panic among Aleppo's population of more than 1 million people. The ethnic and religious minority groups are particularly anguished. The Holy See calls on the international community to prevent the enormous humanitarian disaster that a siege on, and battle over, Aleppo will surely provoke. We must do all we can to prevent yet another gross violation of international humanitarian law and of fundamental human rights.

The Holy See reiterates its condemnation in the strongest terms of all attacks and abuses based on ethnic, religious, racial or other grounds. Once again, it wishes to point out that the disappearance of ethnic and religious minority groups from the Middle East would not only be a religious tragedy, but a loss of a rich patrimony that has contributed so much to the societies to which they belong. That those groups are threatened with extinction causes unfathomable anguish and pain. Last month at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, 65 countries signed a statement supporting the human rights of Christians and other communities, particularly in the Middle East. That statement calls attention to the fact that the instability and conflict in the Middle East seriously threaten the very existence of many religious communities, especially Christians. It calls on all States to join together and address this alarming situation.

When we call to mind those who have already lost their lives or those who have already been driven out of their homes, and even out of their own countries, any action would already be coming too late. But from now on, every action to spare even just one person from persecution and from all forms of atrocities is not only timely, but most urgent. Pope Francis calls on the international community not to remain mute and inert before such an unacceptable crime and not turn a blind eye to this. To watch in complicit silence the horrors of our fellow human beings persecuted, exiled, killed, burned or beheaded solely because they hold a different religious creed or they happen to belong to a minority group can never be an option.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Tymoshenko (Ukraine): At the outset, I would like to thank the President for convening this open debate, which allow us to keep track of the current situation in the Middle East and to facilitate the process of finding ways for settling conflicts and tensions in the region.

While Ukraine has aligned itself with the statement of the observer of the European Union, I would like to add a few words in my national capacity.

Ukraine is committed to a balanced and impartial position on the Middle East issue and is willing to develop stable and constructive relations with both Israel and Arab States. We have consistently support the Middle East peace process, and we believe that

peace in the region can be achieved only if viable mutual concessions are on the negotiating table. Recalling recent efforts aimed at resolving the conflict, such as convening another round of peace talks, we cannot ignore the fact that significant progress in the settlement of the situation in the Middle East has still not been made. On the contrary, recent events testify to the escalation of tensions between the sides, which does not contribute to finding a way out of the political deadlock.

My country's policy is based on the official recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and its aspirations to create an independent Palestinian State. At the same time, the proclamation of the Palestinian State should be contingent on an outcome of the Palestinian-Israeli peace settlement. In that respect, we fully support the United States-led peace efforts, as well as respective United Nations initiatives, and hope they will result in comprehensive agreement between the parties to the conflict. Therefore, we call on political leaders from all sides to work together through visible actions to de-escalate the situation. We believe that direct negotiations between the parties is the only way to reach a peaceful solution, and any unilateral steps will not solve the key problems of the peace settlement. Ukraine is convinced that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be solved only on the basis of the two-State solution. We reiterate our position that a Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement lies within the framework of the unconditional fulfilment by the parties to the conflict of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, including land for peace, the road map, the agreements previously reached by the parties and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002.

With regard to the situation in Syria, Ukraine reaffirms its commitment to the universal principles and basic norms of international law, in particular strict observance of human rights, territorial integrity, the inviolability of borders and State sovereignty. Ukraine strongly condemns the ongoing violence and systematic human rights violations in Syria perpetrated in particular by the regime and terrorist groups. The indiscriminate and excessive use of force by the army against the civilian population, as well as intolerable violence by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other terrorist groups operating on the ground, contributes to the considerable human sufferings in Syria. In that respect, we reiterate our full support for the mission of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for

Syria and other international initiatives brokered by international organizations — such as the United Nations, the League of Arab States, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons — aimed at a strategic de-escalation on the basis of the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex), including an inclusive political transition. We continue to stand for an immediate end to the bloodshed and call for the maximum use of political and diplomatic means to resolve the conflict, in line with respective Security Council resolutions, in order to maintain the country's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Ukraine remains deeply concerned about the activities of ISIL and other associated terrorist entities in the Middle East. The negative impact of their presence in the region, violent extremist ideology and destabilizing actions must not be tolerated and should be duly addressed by the international community. We strongly condemn the crimes and acts of mass violence that ISIL commits against civilians, including the most vulnerable minorities, which may amount to crimes against humanity.

While fighting against foreign-backed terrorists on its soil and facing direct foreign aggression, Ukraine shares the view that activity of such terrorist groups, as well as their violent ideology, constitutes a threat not only to the Middle East region, but also to the international community. We support all efforts aimed at the decisive fight against terrorism regardless of where and in what form it takes place.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Abdrakhmanov (Kazakhstan): I thank the Jordanian presidency for convening today's open debate. Kazakhstan is very much alarmed with the overall situation in the Middle East, including in Palestine and its occupied territories. Well-coordinated international efforts are needed to stop the senseless bloodshed and to find an inclusive political solution. Developments in Palestine, such as the continuing settlement process in the occupied territories, do not allow one to speak of any improvement or mitigation of the situation, which continues to threaten regional and international peace and security.

Kazakhstan recognizes the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, the creation of an independent State of Palestine peacefully coexisting with Israel within the 1967 borders, and the achievement

of full-fledged membership in the United Nations. The two-State solution is the only viable option for a durable peace reached through direct and meaningful negotiations in full conformity with the Charter of the United Nations, relevant Security Council resolutions and other mechanisms, first of all the road map for peace and the Arab Peace initiative. We call therefore on Israeli and Palestinian leaders to show wisdom, responsibility and political will to reach a historic peace agreement that would meet the legitimate aspirations of their peoples.

My country believes that the determined and concerted efforts of all Member States and other relevant stakeholders, together with the United Nations in the leading role, is the only way to combat the violent extremism so widely spread throughout the Middle East. This needs the long-term, comprehensive approach of the entire international community, built on greater regional and global cooperation, in accordance with the Charter and international law.

My country expresses concern over the humanitarian crisis in Syria. The international community must give its utmost attention to this crisis. Kazakhstan believes that resolving the Syrian conflict is possible only through peaceful means, and supports national and international efforts to establish peace and stability in the country. Kazakhstan is also gravely concerned about the developments with regard to the Palestinian refugees in Syria. This crisis reconfirms the extreme vulnerability of the Palestinian refugees and calls for its urgent solution in the context of reaching lasting peace in the region.

We strongly believe that all peaceful means are appropriate for conflict resolution. Besides politicians and diplomats, spiritual leaders should be involved in the process of the quest for peace. At this very moment, the high-level event on tolerance and reconciliation is being held at Headquarters. We commend the tireless efforts and the active stance of the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the High Representative of the Alliance of Civilizations in promoting the ideals and values of tolerance, understanding and mutual respect for attaining durable long-lasting peace and stability.

Kazakhstan regularly convenes the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, at which leaders of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and many other faiths seek together ways to promote peace based on spiritual values. This

June we will host the fifth Congress, aimed at enhancing dialogue among religious and political leaders for peace and development. In addition, I would like to inform the Council that the capital of Kazakhstan, Astana, is going to host the next Middle East media seminar in May.

In conclusion, we again urgently call on all parties, especially those with real political power and influence, to draw on their political will to ensure lasting peace and security in the Middle East, and freedom and justice for all people.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate the brotherly Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan on assuming the presidency of the Council for this month. I would like to welcome Mr. Nasser Judeh, Minister for Foreign and Expatriate Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, for his attendance at this meeting. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

His Majesty King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa, King of the Kingdom of Bahrain, affirmed that while our causes and challenges today are complex and diverse, our principles and positions remain unchanged. At the top of those positions is the right of the Palestinian people to build an independent State on its territory with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. It is also important to put an end to the settlements and lift the unjust and illegal blockade of Gaza.

The Kingdom of Bahrain consistently reiterates its firm position with regard to the Palestinian issue, which is based on the need to implement the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly and to respect the pertinent international agreements. It is essential to work assiduously to find a comprehensive, fair and lasting solution to the issue of Palestine. This can be done only with the complete withdrawal of Israel of occupied Arab territories, the creation of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, and in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the Arab Peace Initiative and the decisions of the Quartet. It is also important to lift the illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip.

The Kingdom of Bahrain reaffirms that Palestine's official membership in the International Criminal Court is a historic event, an important step in the fight of the

brotherly Palestinian people and the result of tireless diplomatic and legal efforts for the nation to recover its full rights.

The path to solving the problem in the Middle East requires the end of the Israeli occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories since 1967, including East Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan. It is also important for Israel to relinquish Lebanese territories, in accordance with the Security Council resolutions.

The Palestinian State must be created as a sovereign State within the borders of 4 June 1967, with Jerusalem as its capital. It is also important to reach a fair settlement to ensure the return of Palestinian refugees in accordance with resolution 194 (III). It is also important to implement resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council and to strictly respect international law, in particular in the framework of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, which bans the introduction of demographic changes in occupied territories.

In conclusion, we must redouble the efforts to support our Palestinian brothers to ensure that their aspirations are realized and that they recover their legitimate and inalienable rights.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan): I would like to thank the President for the month of April, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for convening this important meeting and take this opportunity to pay tribute to the essential role played by Jordan towards the peace and stability of the region. I would also like to thank His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing.

Japan notes with concern that the Middle East peace process has fallen into a vicious circle of mistrust. While negotiations have stalled, the sequence of violence and provocative rhetoric has only deepened this rift. It is evident that this situation is not sustainable. As the international community has manifested time and time again, a just, durable and comprehensive peace between Israel and Palestine, based on a two-state solution, is urgently needed. The window of opportunity is narrowing. Developments on the ground, including illegal settlement activities by Israel and violence from both sides, are making it difficult to resume talks, let alone reach an agreement. An environment conducive to the resumption of talks must be recreated.

Accordingly, Japan calls on the new Israeli Administration to stand by its commitment to a two-State solution, both in words and deeds. We reiterate our call on Israel to completely cease settlement activities, which are illegal under international law and undermine the prospects of a two-State solution. Likewise, the withholding of tax revenues, contrary to the Paris Protocol, has negatively affected the stability of Palestinian institutions. In this regard, Japan welcomes the announcement that an agreement has been reached for the resumption of tax revenue transfers. We call on both parties to refrain from unilateral measures that could undermine efforts for the resumption of peace negotiations. To this end, Prime Minister Abe of Japan visited Israel and Palestine in January and called directly on Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas to resume peace negotiations.

Japan values the critical role that the United States and the Quartet have played in facilitating the peace process negotiations. Nonetheless, in light of the current impasse, it is likewise evident that the international community should also contribute to nurturing an environment that is conducive to negotiations.

Japan believes that a multilateral approach that calls for constructive contributions from countries with the will and capacity to exert positive influence may be propitious to advancing the peace process. As one of the principal donors to the region with strong ties to both sides, Japan stands ready to assume such a role. Moreover, as my delegation stated at the previous open debate on this item (see S/PV.7419), we believe that the Security Council can also play a constructive role, as appropriate and when necessary.

Japan will continue to carry out providing its distinctive support from a mid-to-long-term perspective. We are convinced that fostering mutual trust and creating a sustainable Palestinian economy will facilitate negotiations and underpin the viability of a two-State solution. To that end, in January, Prime Minister Abe announced \$100 million in aid, which was all disbursed within three months. This brings Japan's assistance to Palestine and the peace process to over \$1.6 billion since 1993.

Through ongoing projects, such as the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity Initiative and the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian countries for Palestinian Development, Japan remains resolute in helping lay the groundwork towards the realization of two States living side by side in peace and security. Japan believes

that the day will come in the near future when we can recognize Palestine as a State, in accordance with a two-State solution through negotiations.

I would also have liked to speak today on the situations in Syria and Yemen, however, due to the time limits, I will leave my comments in the full text that has been distributed in the Chamber.

In closing, I wish to emphasize that Japan is conscious of the unique and constructive role it can play in assisting countries of the region achieve peace and prosperity. In the light of the difficult situation in the Middle East, Japan stands ready, more than ever, to continue our cooperation with the United Nations and the international community.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Anshor (Indonesia): I wish to begin by expressing my delegation's appreciation of the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign and Expatriate Affairs of Jordan, Mr. Nasser Judeh, who presided over the open debate this morning.

Indonesia associates itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and Saudi Arabia, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

At the outset, allow me to highlight the incident that took place yesterday in Sana'a, Yemen, as I believe it demands the attention of the Security Council, in the light of the resolution 2216 (2015), which was adopted just last week. On Monday, a bomb attack struck Sana'a, resulting in considerable physical damage upon the premises of the Embassy of Indonesia. The incident also caused physical injuries to two members of our Embassy Staff and one other Indonesian citizen. Indonesia condemns that bomb attack and any attacks that result in casualties among civilian population and damage to properties protected under international law. The bomb attack is a clear example that the use of violence will only result in civilian casualties. In that regard, we re-emphasize that the best solution to the situation in Yemen is through peaceful means of diplomacy and negotiation.

We urge all parties to immediately halt violence and abide by the prevailing international norms and laws on the protection of civilians in times of conflict. Indonesia also urges the Secretary-General

and all concerned parties to immediately implement humanitarian pause to allow all civilians, including foreign nationals, to evacuate Yemen as well as to allow humanitarian assistance to enter the country. While reaffirming the principle of the inviolability of diplomatic and consular premises, we also urge all parties to take all necessary steps to protect diplomatic and consular premises against any intrusion or damage, and to prevent any disturbance of the peace of these missions or impairment of their dignity, as stipulated in the resolution 2216 (2015).

On the question of Palestine, I want to highlight that we are holding this meeting at a time of a near-total absence of traction in the Middle East peace process. Only last month, Israel held a general election. During the election campaign, the world was presented with various comments from Israel disparaging the Palestinian people and demonstrating contempt for the peace process as well as the prospect of a Palestinian State. Needless to say, those comments only strengthened our criticism of Israel and further question its commitment to peace.

It is the belief of my delegation that only by a return to the peace process and a demonstration of goodwill and seriousness by the Government of Israel can we find out if those comments were nothing more than the convenient posturing of politicians. However, as we know, nothing has changed. Israel continues to commit the same grave and systematic violations of international law that it has done for the past 60 years. The establishment and expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories continues, along with the associated restrictions on movement and access to land. The excessive use of force by Israeli forces towards the Palestinian people continues, in a climate of impunity.

The Gaza Strip remains a tragic and empty husk, shelled out last year and suffering from the effects of the Israeli blockade. Israel has also continued to play games with the Palestinian tax revenues, as a means of blackmailing the Palestinian Government and seeing to its economic collapse. In other words, the Security Council today faces a challenge that is no different from those of yesterday or years before. That challenge is for the Council to act courageously to end the Israeli occupation of Palestine and implement the two-State vision. It is time that the Council honoured the Charter of the United Nations and its mandate under it by

refusing to be, in effect, a tool for the perpetuation of decades of injustice and impasse in the Middle East.

A comprehensive, just and lasting settlement can be achieved peacefully and on the basis of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, the road map of the Quartet and the Arab Peace Initiative. We reiterate our position that the Council cannot afford to play the part of just another actor, or worse still, the role of a spectator, in the search for a comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine. We also call on the United Nations, as a member of the Quartet, to stand with the children of Palestine and to restart the peace process to ensure that they and the children of Israel enjoy the peace and stability that has been denied to their predecessors.

Before concluding my statement, I cannot fail to bring to the Council's attention the fate of the Palestine refugee camp in Yarmouk, Syria. The camp's takeover earlier this month by a terrorist group has worsened the lives of the refugees remaining there. This development, along with the suffering inflicted on the refugees in the more than two-year siege of the camp, adds to the list of injustices being borne by Palestinian refugees. Indonesia calls on the Council to act urgently to address that tragedy and at the same time to work expeditiously and without further delay towards reaching a political solution to the conflict in Syria.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Ms. Paik Ji-ah (Republic of Korea): The debate over a two-State solution raised during the latest elections in Israel reminded us all of the grim state of affairs of the Middle East peace process. My delegation believes that in order to preserve a two-State solution, all actors must adhere to their previous commitments and step up their efforts to restart the peace negotiations with a view to establishing a more sustainable future for future generations of Israelis and Palestinians. We were encouraged by the news over the weekend regarding the long-standing dispute over the transfer of tax revenue from Israel to the Palestinian Authority. An insolvent Palestinian Authority is in no one's interests. At the same time, the Republic of Korea remains concerned about the expanded settlement activity and the detrimental effect it has on the viability of a two-State solution. Settlements are not only illegal, they are not in Israel's long-term strategic interests and run contrary to international peace efforts.

Turning to the situation in Syria, the Republic of Korea is deeply concerned about the unprecedented scale of the violence as the conflict enters its fifth year. The culture of unmitigated impunity and the systematic violations of human rights and humanitarian laws are particularly disturbing. In that regard, we welcome the adoption of resolution 2199 (2015), aimed at cutting off the major means of funding used by terrorists. However, the international community must do more to address this drawn-out conflict. In that regard, we are encouraged by the outcome of the third international humanitarian pledging conference for Syria, held in Kuwait on 31 March. As we did at the time, the Republic of Korea commends the host Governments of Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey for their tremendous efforts to lessen the suffering of the Syrian people. On top of the \$14 million in humanitarian assistance it has given Syria over the past three years, the Republic of Korea, heeding the call of the Council and the international community, pledged another \$10 million at the March conference.

Regarding Yemen, my delegation is deeply concerned about the continuously deteriorating situation on the ground. In recognition of the urgent need for humanitarian assistance, the Republic of Korea recently pledged \$500,000 in aid through United Nations agencies. We welcome the Council's adoption of resolution 2216 (2015), which calls on the Yemeni parties to resume the political transition process in accordance with the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, the outcomes of the comprehensive National Dialogue Conference, and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We urge all the parties involved to focus particularly on protecting civilians and facilitating the evacuation of foreign residents from Yemen.

In conclusion, the continued instability of the region is no longer a crisis for the Middle East alone. The refugee situation is reverberating beyond the region, as was witnessed by the drowning of more than 1,100 migrants in the Mediterranean just this past month. We simply must do more to put a stop to violence and re-start efforts to find a sustainable political solution.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Shava (Zimbabwe): I would like to express my appreciation to Jordan for convening this important debate on the situation in the Middle East, including

the question of Palestine, at this critical time for the Palestinian people. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his insightful briefing and Jordan's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs for presiding over our debate this morning.

Zimbabwe aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We wish to reaffirm our long-standing solidarity and support for the Palestinian people's realization of their legitimate national aspirations and inalienable right to self-determination and freedom in their independent State of Palestine, living side by side with the State of Israel.

The question of Palestine has been on the agenda of the United Nations for more than 60 years now. Yet despite decades of Palestine's good-faith participation in peace efforts, its plight continues to worsen on all fronts. It is regrettable that the Security Council has failed to contribute meaningfully to a peaceful solution in the Middle East, even as the situation continues to deteriorate and threaten the stability of the whole region and of global peace and security generally. Israel, the occupying Power, continues to undermine all peace efforts, supported by some within the Council under the guise of the right to self-defence. The Israeli Prime Minister's unfortunate statement, on the eve of the Israeli elections, rejecting a two-State solution, and his pledge to continue building settlements, confirmed suspicions that he was never serious about negotiations, casting the viability of a two-State solution into grave doubt. We call on the Israeli Government to reaffirm its commitment to a two-State solution and take credible steps towards a peaceful solution.

Zimbabwe is seriously concerned about Israel's escalation of settlement construction throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, in breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and several United Nations resolutions, including some of the Council's. Those and other systematic violations, including the detention and displacement of Palestinian civilians, undermine any prospects for peace. A lasting peace in the Middle East can only be achieved through a two-State solution. Any attempt to change demographic realities through settlements or the use of force will only prolong the suffering of the Palestinian people.

We continue to witness the suffering and persecution of the people of Palestine at the hands of the occupying Power, Israel. Zimbabwe strongly condemns, now or in the future, the withholding of the much-needed tax revenue owed to the Palestinian Authority. This inhumane act has forced and will continue to force the Palestinian Authority to adopt austerity measures affecting the livelihood of the Palestinian people. For these crimes, Israel should be held accountable. Zimbabwe supports investigations into the alleged war crimes committed during the last Gaza war, and those found accountable should be prosecuted as recommended by the Human Rights Council.

Limited progress has been made in the reconstruction of thousands of homes, hospitals and schools damaged or destroyed by the Israeli army in Gaza last August. The critical situation in Gaza needs to be urgently addressed so as to alleviate the humanitarian disaster caused by the Israeli armed forces' indiscriminate bombardments. We urge the international community to accelerate support for reconstruction to address the basic needs of the Palestinian people. We also call on the international community to address Gaza's underlying problems to ensure that the matter is dealt with in a holistic manner so as to prevent future wars.

The Security Council cannot remain on the sidelines in the quest to find a just and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine. Failure to resolve this question continues to undermine the credibility of our international system and the rule of law. Zimbabwe urges the Security Council to take the lead and revive the peace process in order to preserve the internationally supported goal of a two-State solution. There is unanimity that the status quo cannot be sustained. The Security Council should act in accordance with its Charter responsibilities and end Israeli occupation and impunity, which has brought untold suffering to the Palestinian people and sown so much instability in the Middle East.

We wish to express our support for a resolution that sets parameters for a final-status agreement on ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and this decades-long injustice. A resolution delineating a time frame for the independence of Palestine, in line with the United Nations proposal on the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders, would restore hope to the Palestinian people that their national aspirations will soon be realized.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate Zimbabwe's unflinching solidarity and support for the Palestinian people in their quest for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Maldives.

Mr. Sareer (Maldives): On behalf of the Republic of Maldives, I wish to express our deep appreciation to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, in its capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of April, for convening this timely debate in connection with the agenda item on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. We would also like to express our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his briefing and his dedicated efforts to find a lasting solution to the various conflicts that still plague this region.

The Maldives takes this opportunity to express once again its unyielding support for the people and cause of Palestine and its support for bringing to an end the violence in the region. It is with great sadness that we bear witness to the continuing atrocities by those who choose to promote violence, hatred and fear. Time and again, the progress made has given way to conflict, making it seemingly impossible to see lasting peace. The report of the Secretary-General in particular notes that the access of Palestinians to agricultural lands in the West Bank has been denied. Agriculture is the main source of employment and resources for Palestinians, and this restriction severely limits the economic security of the Palestinian people and the ability of the Palestinian Government to provide basic services to its people.

The Maldives reiterates its call for the full realization of the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people and the right of Palestinian people to establish their own State, alongside Israel, on the basis of the two-State solution, on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Violence and oppression breed hatred. Children currently living under occupation, oppressed, with their basic rights denied, are growing up with hatred in their hearts and revenge on their minds. Today we are seeing this hatred manifest among young people from every nation, race and creed, with immense security implications for the Middle East and the entire world.

It is that hatred, along with misguided views and information, that fuel recruitment into terrorist organizations, including the so-called Islamic State. The so-called Islamic State poses one of the greatest challenges facing the Islamic Ummah and the greatest emerging threat to the global community. The atrocities they commit in the name of Islam are inhumane and un-Islamic. The Maldives stands with the international community in strongly condemning their activities and in strong support of the initiatives of the Council and other Member States in this regard.

The situation in Syria is of great concern, too. The fighting continues to escalate across the country. Yesterday, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Pierre Krähenbühl, informed us about the perilous situation in Yarmouk. We are deeply concerned about this degrading humanitarian situation and the fact that UNRWA did not have access to the camp and needed secure conditions to deliver aid and enable the evacuation of civilians. The protection of civilians, especially those already trapped in vulnerable situations, such as the refugees of Yarmouk, must take priority.

We must be resolute in our efforts, as an international community, to face the challenges of our time head-on. We see encouragement in the nuclear deal agreed between Iran and the P5+1. We see hope in the many pledges of humanitarian assistance and the many calls against violence and for action. We must continue in our efforts to provide lasting solutions, to stop the senseless cycle of violence and hatred, and to bring lasting change for the security and peace of our entire global community.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Ms. Muthukumarana (Sri Lanka): I join other speakers in commending you, Mr. President, for having convened this important debate. The Sri Lankan delegation associates itself with the statement made by Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. My delegation wishes to express our appreciation for the dedicated service of Mr. Robert Serry, the outgoing United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and to wish his successor, Mr. Nikolay Mladenov, success in this key leadership role. Proactive leadership in the international community is essential in order to find a just and durable solution to the question of Palestine.

Successive generations of Palestinians have suffered owing to a range of factors, in particular by being dispossessed from much of their land. In recent years, the continuing blockade of Gaza has added to the difficulties experienced by the Palestinian people. Restrictions on imports and exports due to the blockade are stifling economic growth as well as aggravating the humanitarian crisis. We are deeply concerned at the situation in Gaza, where the basic needs of the Palestinian population must be addressed following the conflict last year, which resulted in large-scale destruction and displacement. Continuing the humanitarian and reconstruction assistance for the devastated Gaza Strip should be a priority. In addition, the pace of reconstruction needs to be accelerated to address basic needs as well as to ensure stability.

The fulfilment of pledges made at the Cairo conference for Palestine last year will be a lifeline for the Palestinian people to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. Also, the funding of United Nations agencies that carry out vital operations in Gaza for both the refugee and non-refugee populations must receive the highest priority. Peace negotiations need to be resumed as soon as possible with the goal of reaching a just and durable solution consistent with the principles of international law, and relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. Both parties to the conflict must actively pursue every possibility for peace with a view to ultimately establishing an independent State of Palestine that exists peacefully, side by side with Israel. A climate conducive to peace would be encouraged by an approach of mutual sensitivity to each other's concerns.

We would also like to reiterate that the security needs of the Israeli people must be respected. An improvement in the conditions of the Palestinians would contribute to improving the situation of the region as a whole. The ongoing settlement activities, which are illegal under international law, need to end at the earliest for a sustainable solution. Sri Lanka supports the implementation of General Assembly resolutions concerning the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the attainment of a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. Sri Lanka also supports Palestine's application for admission to full membership in the United Nations. We recognize that the viability of the two-State solution will depend on the political unity and economic advancement of the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, we hope that both Israel and Palestine will utilize the opportunities presented during this year to achieve a historic peace agreement in the interest of their future generations.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): A number of delegations have requested the floor to make additional statements. I ask that each delegation limit itself to one additional statement.

I give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Nitzan (Israel): I would like to take this opportunity to respond to comments made by certain delegations during the course of today's meeting. First of all, it comes as quite a surprise that the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), with members such as Zimbabwe, Cuba, Indonesia and Malaysia, has the audacity to hypocritically lecture Israel on international law and human rights while many of its leading members, such as Iran, Saudi Arabia and Syria, are the world's worst human rights abusers and oppressive regimes. I was particularly surprised to hear the Indonesian representative, who so conveniently did not mention the barbaric beheading of two Indonesian nationals by Saudi legal authorities only this week. I would like to remind the Indonesian representative that such brutality on the part of the Saudi State is one of the central aspects of the situation in the Middle East today, and that hypocrisy is a central character in NAM's statements in this institution.

With respect to the Syrian statement, I would like to mention two things. The first is a fact — the responsibility of that representative's regime for the death of more than 220,000 Syrians. No inflammatory statements or lies can cover that truth. Blaming Israel for the evacuation of United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) troops from the area of separation is nothing more than revisionist history. The truth of the matter is that the Syrian army fled in the face of advancing Jabhat Al-Nusrah terrorists, leaving UNDOF troops unprotected and at risk. Recognizing that danger, Israel opened its gates and provided UNDOF safe harbour, where they remain to this day. Syrian lies cannot cover that truth.

I found it interesting to hear an Iranian representative speaking about Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory. I believe it is well known that, today, Iran is the main occupier in the Middle East, including in Lebanon. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard is a Security Council-designated entity responsible for the

murder of tens of thousands of civilians in the Middle East and terror attacks around the world. Iran is the occupier of Arab territories and Arab capitals in our region, in Lebanon, in Syria, in Iraq and in Yemen. In Lebanon, Iran is the chief sponsor and supplier of illicit advanced weapons to Hezbollah, a designated terrorist organization. In blatant violation of resolutions 1559 (2004), 1701 (2006) and sanctions resolution 1747 (2007), Iran and its proxies, be it the Al-Assad regime, Hizbullah, Hamas or the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, are a threat to international peace and security. It is time to address that threat.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of Saudi Arabia has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Alyas (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Israel continues its desperate attempts to distort the truth in order to divert the Council's attention from what its forces are doing to the Palestinian people. It does so by attacking anyone who criticizes its oppressive policies and actions, which contravene international law and resolutions concerning Palestine. The statement delivered by the representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia this morning explained very clearly and in detail our position with regard to Israeli distortions, claims and lies, whether they be the ones included in their original statement or their subsequent statement.

The representative of the Syrian regime also continues to repeat the same false claims against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, an indication of his own failure and inability to divert the attention of the Council from the crimes the Syrian regime has committed against the Syrian people.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has repeatedly reaffirmed its condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. The defeat and eradication of terrorism require that the root causes be addressed. That includes the practices of the Syrian regime, specifically the violations committed against the Syrian people. The representative of the Syrian regime has gone so far as to use methods, such as the amputation of hands, arms, and so on, against those who opposed the Syrian regime and aspired to freedom and dignity.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Safaei (Islamic Republic of Iran): I asked for the floor to reply to the two meaningless statements

of rhetoric made by the representatives of the Israeli regime this morning and afternoon in the Council. They were statements imbued, as always, with baseless allegations and exaggerations against my Government and now, it would seem, all members of the Non-Aligned Movement. They were statements basically designed to divert attention from the atrocities, aggressions and violations that Israel always commits against the Palestinian population.

Recent bigoted statements by the Head of the Israeli regime against the Arab residents of Israel and his words about the so-called peace process and the two-State solution were of great importance, as they took the mask off and bared their face for the whole world to see. In that way, they fully showed their racist, bigoted nature, on the one hand, and their nefarious intentions in pretending to talk to Palestinians about peace for the past two decades, on the other hand.

It is indeed very ironic and appalling that a regime famous for its apartheid policies and war crimes, which is well documented by different United Nations organs and agencies, which has failed to comply with many United Nations regulations and resolutions and has for many decades occupied lands belonging to other people, can allow itself to accuse other countries in such a sinister way. It is also preposterous that the same regime, with a well-known record of developing, producing and stockpiling different kinds of inhumane weapons, including nuclear weapons, ventures to falsely accuse others of others trying to acquire the same type of weapon.

While they always claim to be concerned about the Iranian nuclear programme, which is fully peaceful and under international supervision, we in the region and across the globe are fully right to worry about the nuclear weapons in the hands of this regime, which has shown time and again its capacity and propensity for killing, with the latest example being the rampage in July and August 2014 against defenceless Palestinians. Can we, or any other people, believe that the representatives of Israel mean anything other than to divert international attention away from the crimes that their regime is committing against its neighbours with pyromaniacal intensity?

The Israeli regime has always tried hard to sabotage and disrupt the earnest and serious negotiations that my Government has been engaged in during the past two years to address any genuine concern that the international community may have about the Iranian

nuclear programme. We have no doubt that not only the progress achieved in these negotiations but also Israel's resounding defeat in obstructing the way to an agreement are a severe cause of anxiety and distress for them. The rant we heard today in the Council is

a nervous reaction to the rebuff they receive in this respect.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There are no more speakers inscribed on my list.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.